













**THE STORY OF  
THE SALONICA ARMY**



11922  
200

# THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

BY

G. WARD PRICE

The Official Correspondent with the Allied Forces  
in the Balkans

*ILLUSTRATED*

SECOND EDITION.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

1918



*To*  
**MY MOTHER**



## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD.

THE sections of this book relating the difficulties under which the British Army in Macedonia has for two years past been gallantly doing its duty may in some parts read to those who know the facts rather like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. These are places where, in spite of a very real effort on the writer's part to avoid indiscretion, the Censorship has laid an obliterating hand. The same reason must account for the omission of the names of the units which took part in the determined attacks upon the Bulgar front at Doiran last spring.

It is a trying campaign that we are waging in Macedonia, a monotonous campaign, and one that by comparison with the Western front sometimes seems to the men out there like a backwater where they are half forgotten by their friends at home. But they keep their hearts high and their fighting spirit unabated.

To all ranks of the Salonica Army the author, as the humble recorder of their doings, offers with this book his tribute of respect.





## CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.	PAGE,
HAS SALONICA BEEN WORTH WHILE ? .. ..	1
CHAPTER II.	
THE FIRST FIGHTING AND THE FRENCH PUSH INTO SERBIA .. .. .	13
CHAPTER III.	
THE BULGAR ATTACK ON THE TENTH DIVISION ..	41
CHAPTER IV.	
THE " BIRD-CAGE " .. .. .	59
CHAPTER V.	
GETTING READY ; AND INCIDENTS OF THE SPRING .. .. .	65
CHAPTER VI.	
OURSELVES AND THE GREEKS : RELATIONS AT SALONICA .. .. .	73
CHAPTER VII.	
OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE " SALONICA REVOLUTION " .. .. .	93
CHAPTER VIII.	
THE RESURRECTION OF THE SERBIAN ARMY ..	115

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER IX.		PAGE
THE COMING OF THE RUSSIANS AND ITALIANS..		127
CHAPTER X.		
THE BULGAR SUMMER OFFENSIVE OF 1916 AND ITS CHECK BY THE SERBS AT OSTROVO ..		139
CHAPTER XI.		
THE PUSH FOR MONASTIR, WITH BRITISH CO- OPERATION .. .. .		249
CHAPTER XII.		
MONASTIR RETAKEN .. .. .		178
CHAPTER XIII.		
THE INEVITABLE WINTER LULL AND THE BEGINNINGS OF OUR SPRING OFFENSIVE..		187
CHAPTER XIV.		
THE BRITISH BATTLE OF DOIRAN .. ..		197
CHAPTER XV.		
KING CONSTANTINE'S ATTITUDE AND THE OCCUPATION OF THESSALY.. ..		207
CHAPTER XVI.		
THE GREAT IMPEDIMENTS: TRANSPORT AND FEVER.. .. .		241
CHAPTER XVII.		
PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS IN MACEDONIA..		255
CHAPTER XVIII.		
WHAT IS HAPPENING IN ALBANIA .. ..		285

## SUMMARY OF THE CAMPAIGN.

### *How We Came.*

Allies landed Salonica, October, 1915. They came at the invitation of M. Venizelos, Greek Premier. Salonica, though neutral territory, was available as a base because Greece was united to Serbia by a treaty of alliance. Venizelos mobilised the Greek Army to co-operate, but King Constantine unconstitutionally drove him from power when the Allies had already begun to land.

### *Numbers.*

Our forces at Salonica were at first limited to a few English and a few French divisions. Later arrived the Serbian Army from Corfu, and Russian and Italian contingents. Later still, one or two Greek divisions raised by Venizelos. The Bulgars have always outnumbered us, have heavier artillery and hold the stronger positions.

### *First Stage (October–December, 1915).*

Determined but unsuccessful attempt by French to join hands with the retreating Serbians. Subsequent retirement of French on Salonica, a British division which had been protecting their flank becoming involved in the retreat.

xii      **SUMMARY OF THE CAMPAIGN.**

*Second Stage (January–March, 1916).*

Creation of the “entrenched camp” of Salonica.

*Third Stage (April–June, 1916).*

Gradual moving up of the Allied troops towards the Greek frontier. Establishment there of a line to serve either as an advanced position to resist an enemy attack or as a taking-off place for an Allied offensive. Much building of roads, bridges, railways, piers—the country lacking all such means of transport.

*Fourth Stage (July–August, 1916).*

Bulgarian advance on both flanks, reaching to Lake Ostrovo in the west and Cavalla in the east.

*Fifth Stage (September–November, 1916).*

Thrust back of the offensive of the Bulgars in the west, culminating in the recapture of Monastir. Holding attacks and local gains on the British sector.

*Sixth Stage (December, 1916–February, 1917).*

Winter of enforced inactivity—owing to mud—and preparation for spring offensive.

*Seventh Stage (March–May, 1917).*

Attacks in force by Allies along front from Lake Ochrida to Lake Doiran. Heavy fighting, but no substantial gain of ground.

*Eighth Stage (June, 1917).*

Occupation of Thessaly by Allies. Restoration of Venizelos to power and acquisition of co-operation of the Greek Army.

## SUMMARY OF THE CAMPAIGN xiñ

### *Present Situation (Summer, 1917).*

Eighteen months of very great labour, much sickness and hard fighting, whenever occasion offered, have left the Balkan campaign in a temporary condition of deadlock. As things stand at present the enemy's front and our own have proved mutually impregnable. Future developments may alter this, notably the arrival of Greek reinforcements.



## CHAPTER I.

### HAS SALONICA BEEN WORTH WHILE ?

"~~WHAT IS~~ the Salonica Army doing ? " is a question which hundreds of thousands of Englishmen have asked at one time or another, and one which this book is an attempt, however inadequate, to answer. But the spirit of the question really goes beyond the letter, and the average man by this enquiry means, " Why has the Salonica Army not done more ? "

The aims for which an Allied expedition to the Balkans was warmly advocated, especially in France, in the autumn of 1915, have fallen a great way short of the fulfilment then expected for them. The rescue of invaded Serbia and the erection of a barrier across Germany's direct road to Turkey were the ends to which the public looked at the time of the landing at Salonica, and the feeling of disappointment that no such striking and decisive goals have been achieved has bred a mood of dissatisfaction with the Allied Army in the Balkans which it by no means deserves, when its quite inadequate numbers and equipment for tasks of such magnitude are taken into consideration. First of all, the Allies arrived in the Balkans too late to do anything big there. Had they come a little earlier—in July, 1915, for instance—to reinforce the Serbian Army, which was then still in existence as a fighting force, it might possibly have been a different story. But in October, when our troops began to land, Serbia was already lost,



## 2 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

outnumbered and overwhelmed by the Austrians from the north and the Bulgars from the east. In consequence of this, the Balkan Army, after a bold but ineffective attempt to join up with the retreating Serbs, to save, at any rate, the southern part of the country from the invader, was thrown solely upon its own resources to achieve what it might. Nor did any of the help which had been half counted upon when the expedition was first decided come from the Greek Army. Instead, the Greeks, after Venizelos had been driven from office by King ~~Constantine~~, constituted themselves, in our rear and all around us, a virtual enemy all the more dangerous for being unavowed.

Starting from this stone-cold beginning then, with the Bulgars and their German allies in full possession of Serbia and ourselves having no more than a precarious footing upon the somewhat dubiously neutral soil of Greece, let us consider some of the obstacles which the Allied Army of the Orient has since had to overcome.

First and fundamental among these obstacles has been the necessity of creating, importing, and improvising, in a mother-naked land, the whole of the elaborate organisation which a modern army requires as a foundation to work upon. When you step out of Salonica you step into a virtual desert, roadless, treeless, uncultivated, populated only by scattered villages of the most primitive kind, inhabited by a low-grade peasantry. We found here none of the materials which modern armies need for their use, none of that machinery of civilisation which in France, for instance, lies ready-made to the hand. Two roads, in a condition quite inadequate to support heavy traffic, and three single lines of railway ran, at the most divergent angles possible, from Salonica towards the enemy's territory. Apart from these

## HAS SALONICA BEEN WORTH WHILE ? 8

there was hardly even a track which in winter was possible for wheeled traffic. So that from the very beginning the Allied Forces have had to build up, slowly, laboriously, the whole of the system of locomotion necessary for themselves and their supplies; piers, roads, bridges, railways—all have had to be created where nothing of the kind previously existed. The Army, in fact, has only been able to move up country at all on condition of dragging with it a slowspun network of means of communication.

Many handicaps have affected the Balkan Army. One that is plain to all, and has weighed heavily upon it, is a climate most unpropitious for soldiering, cold and wet in winter, hot and feverish in summer. In fact, the campaigning season in the Balkans may be said to be limited by weather conditions to a few weeks of the spring and autumn of each year. Winter, right up to the beginning of April, is a season of snow, rain, and, above all, mud. Tracks dissolve into quagmires, main roads break up into holes and ridges impassable for motor traffic, and transport becomes a matter of the very greatest difficulty, testing almost to breaking-point any organisation of the service of supply.

It has not, moreover, been entirely an element of strength to the Balkan campaign that our Army there is made up of contingents of all the Allies. With the best will in the world a mixed force will not work together so well as a homogeneous one. There are differences of language, differences of method, differences of character. Each of the Allied contingents has its own Staff, whose ideas have to be co-ordinated with those of the French General Staff, under General Sarrail, the Commander-in-Chief. Coalitions never did yet work without a certain amount of friction now and then. The Allied Governments themselves have to hold constant

#### 4' THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Councils to keep their views in harmony. But the creation of an Allied General Staff at Salonica would obviate the little misunderstandings that at present inevitably arise sometimes between the contingents of six nationalities that make up our force in the Balkans.

Under the restrictions that I have detailed above, what has the Allied Army in the Balkans achieved since October, 1915? Certain facts may be claimed to stand clearly to its credit :

1. *If the Allies had not come to Salonica the Germans would have overrun and mastered the whole of the Balkan peninsula.*

This may be regarded as sure. • The Greek king was already their man. His people have certainly always been against fighting anybody, for the Germans ~~or~~ against them, but the Germans would have known how to change all that.

2. *Germany would have established a submarine base at Salonica if we had not occupied it, and even made of it a Mediterranean Kiel.*

This is also likely. On the other hand, the Allied Fleets in that case could have blockaded Salonica as they blockade the Austrian ports, and the Germans have so many submarine bases in the Mediterranean already that they do not urgently need any more.

3. *Our Forces in the Balkans have held up a relatively greater number of the enemy.*

The superiority in number of Germans, Austrians, Bulgarians and Turks against us has sometimes been as great as 40,000 to 50,000 men. The Balkan Army has more than pulled its weight. But if it had never been sent to the Balkans it would have been pulling just as much weight on some other front, and probably at much less cost, for the great argument against maintaining a merely holding-

## HAS SALONICA BEEN WORTH WHILE ? 5

front at the other end of Europe is its terrible costliness, especially in sea transport.

4. *It has given the Serbs back Monastir and kept them together and in heart as a nation.*

This is indisputable. The Serbs must have lost their spirit long ago if it were not that they have been able to fight their way back on to a narrow fringe of Serbian soil.

But in trying to form an opinion as to whether the Salonica Expedition was or was not a wise enterprise to undertake, it must not be forgotten how greatly and unexpectedly the general conditions of the war have changed since our landing there was made. In 1915 there was apparently good reason for hoping that effective co-operation might be possible between a force based on Salonica and the Russians. We did not then know to what extent pro-German internal forces were at work in Russia, deliberately restricting her military action. If Russia had been knocking at the Bulgarian door on the other side our fortunes in the Balkans might have been far otherwise. The entry of Roumania into the war was the event to which the Allied Governments looked forward as the great opportunity for the Salonica force to begin an offensive against Bulgaria, henceforth threatened from two sides. But the misguided strategy which sent the greater part of the Roumanian Army on a badly organised invasion of Transylvania, in pursuit of an immediate territorial objective instead of using it to co-operate with the Allies at Salonica, defeated this hope, which in any case could hardly have been realised, in view of the treachery with which the Russian Government then in power deliberately abandoned Roumania to the enemy in pursuit of its policy of pro-Germanism and a separate peace.

It must not be supposed that the Allied Army in the Balkans has accepted its present situation of

## 6 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

stalemate through inertia. Not only has it fought vigorously in the offensives that it has undertaken, but it has cast about, though without practical result hitherto, for other plans of campaign to follow, other routes of penetration into the enemy's country.

But apart from all speculation as to what might have been done by the Salonica Army under different conditions ; as to what point on the map might have been reached ; as to whether or not it was ever possible to drive a wedge into Germany's line of communications with Turkey, there are considerations of a larger nature to be borne in mind. England, especially, cannot afford to disinterest herself from the Balkans because the Balkans are one of the principal stepping-stones on the way to India. Whatever else might be the conditions on which the war were brought to an end, a peace which left Germany with undisputed rule or even undisputed influence over the Balkans would be a German victory, and the vast sacrifices which she and her allies have made would be held by Germany to be justified, if, as a result of them, she could consolidate this first great stage of her thrust towards India and that dominion in Middle Asia which has always been the traditional goal of world-conquerors and the possession of which is the historical symbol of world-supremacy.

It is therefore of the first importance to the British Empire that there should be in the Balkans a barrier-state across the path of this German *Drang nach Osten*. Egypt and the Suez Canal have lost much of their importance as the gatehouse of the East now that the trans-Balkan railway runs straight through from Berlin to Bagdad. To quote a distinguished officer who has much studied the strategic problems of the Mediterranean : " The frontier of India should be at Belgrade ; we are actually defending it, at

## HAS SALONICA BEEN WORTH WHILE ? 7

Bagdad, and if the war leaves Germany with a strengthened position in the Near East, the day may come when we have to defend it at Bombay."

All that seems, indeed, to presume a perpetuation of the state of semi-hostility that we all hope the war will somehow abolish as the normal peace-time condition of international affairs, but until there are more signs than are at present manifest that the German leopard is going to change his spots, and that German schemes for substituting Germania for Britannia throughout the world have ceased to be cherished, the defence of our Indian Empire will have to be taken into the consideration of our statesmen.

Our interest in Serbia, then, is not merely the sentimental one of a big ally for a small; it is based on something more tangible than sympathy for "gallant little Serbia." In the Serbians, with their strongly marked national character, their passion for independence, their traditional Slav hostility towards the Teuton, we find the natural buffer-state which should bar Germany's way towards India and the East and cut her off from that outlet to the Mediterranean at Salonica which, if she gained it, would change the world's naval balance of power, and force us for the defence of Egypt constantly to maintain a large fleet in the Levant.

Our going to Salonica has had, then, this advantageous consequence—it has been a practical guarantee that the great and vital interests which the Allies, especially ourselves, possess in the Balkans should not be lost sight of; that public attention should be kept alive and well informed upon a part of the world where our diplomatic blunders in the past have wrought us only too much harm, and that the Serbs, that virile little people whom destiny and the situation of their country have called to play so important a part in the modern history of Europe,

## 8 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

should have received a practical gage of the Allies' support.

For it must be remembered that had we not gone to Salonica the Serbian nation by now would have been little more than a memory. Practically the whole of their country has lain for two years under the hand of an enemy who has been working with all his talent for organisation to stamp out from the invaded land the consciousness of a separate race. Serbia has been deliberately divided up between the Austrians and the Bulgars. Hungarian and Bulgar merchants and bankers have established themselves in the towns. All the population capable of working has been drafted out of the country in captive gangs to unknown destinations.

Under these conditions of defencelessness live the great majority of the wives and children of the Serbian Army now fighting by our side in the Balkans, cut off from all communication with or knowledge of their relatives. It is not to be supposed that this Army, the pathetic remnant of the manhood of Serbia, could ever have been reformed after its complete disorganisation in the retreat across Albania, could ever have found the spirit to fight again so gallantly and hopefully, as it is doing, anywhere else than on the threshold of its own country. The offers of peace which the enemy has held out to the Serbian Government, proposing to them immediate realisation of the ideal of Greater Serbia (the union of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into one country), under Austrian supremacy but with a large measure of autonomy, have been steadfastly refused, thanks to the confidence and hope with which the close co-operation of the Allies in the field has filled the Serbians.

But had we deliberately abandoned Serbia to the fate from which we were in fact powerless to save her,

## HAS SALONICA BEEN WORTH WHILE ? 9

it is difficult to see how the Serbs would have kept up their courage and unyielding enthusiasm for the cause of the Allies during these two years of exile from their homes.

So much for the history of the Allied Army in the Balkans up to now. What, on the other hand, are the possibilities that lie before it in the future ? •

This summer of 1917 has seen a most important political change in the situation in the Balkans which may have the effect of giving more scope to the Salonica Army : M. Venizelos has been restored to power and has declared the Greek Army to be on our side against the Bulgars.

The extent to which the Greek Army will help us to make good in the Balkans, however, depends obviously upon the extent to which it is employed as an addition to our present strength and not as a substitute for troops which are now, or were until recently, there.

When I say " make good in the Balkans " I mean do something which will seriously interfere with the full use of the Balkans which the Germans have at present as a channel of communication with the Near East and as the hyphen of " Middle-Europe." For all that the Allies have been able to do towards that end up to now, we might as well have never left the entrenched camp of Salonica.

Once again, let no one blame the Salonica Force, nor the Allied Army in the Balkans of which it forms a part, nor yet the Higher Command. They have done all they could with the resources and the strength they had. They are up against difficulties that must be seen to be understood. It must be remembered that Salonica, more than any other part of the war, is a joint undertaking of the Allies, and amid all the difficulties which attend a coalition, the British General Staff has always taken a line that is



## 16 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

coldly practical, uninfluenced by illusion, however attractive.

Even supposing that you could get out to Salonica the men and the stores and the supplies for a largely increased army, there would remain the problem of land-transport in the actual area of operations. In the mountainous Balkans you are forced to use very much pack and horse-drawn transport, and it is the forage required for the animals that constitutes the problem of the supply question, not the food for the troops. Of course, a great deal of motor-transport, too, is needed. To supply our single army corps on the Struma last winter a very large number of motor-lorries was required, and there was only one road for all of them to run on.

As a principle it has been demonstrated that if an army is going to attack it must have a railway behind it. Accordingly, if the Balkan Army is to penetrate into the territory now held by the enemy deeply enough to interfere with Germany's trans-Balkan system of communications, there is only one way for it to go—up the Vardar—for that way lies the only railway line. Transport up the Kresna defile, the shortest way to Sofia, would have to be by road.

What, then, remains for the Balkan Army to do to help in winning the war?

It has one clear and important function left. It is firmly established on the threshold of the enemy's stronghold at the very point where that edifice is weakest. The Balkans are the hinge and pivot of Germany's schemes of conquest in this war. Northern France, Belgium, perhaps even Alsace-Lorraine, she would abandon with equanimity if only she can keep her hold on this avenue to the East. India, the symbol of world-empire, draws her like a magnet, and the road to it lies through Belgrade, Sofia and Con-

## HAS SALONICA BEEN WORTH WHILE ? 11

stantinople. Her hand is at the present moment on the door of the unexplored treasure-house of *Asia Minor*, and she is desperately anxious to keep it there.

Her success in doing so depends entirely on her power to maintain the control of the Balkans that she has been consolidating during the last two years. Bulgaria is acquired to German interests by the bribe of the Serbian territory in Macedonia that she covets, by the alluring prospect of holding the hegemony over the whole Balkans under German auspices, and by the personal influence of her crafty German king. Turkey is an invertebrate nation, with no such institution as public opinion, and the despotic clique that rules it is absolutely in the grip of Germany. Through them the Germans have drawn into their hands all the machinery of government.

This state of affairs in the Balkans will last for so long a time as Germany is unbeaten in the major theatres of war. But when it becomes evident, as sooner or later it must, that the German colossus is cracking, these vassal states will begin to see that their safety lies in getting out before the final collapse comes. The rats will look for a way out of the sinking ship.

At that moment the existence of a powerful Allied Army on the spot in the Balkans will be of great value. It will apply the external pressure that will hasten the internal crumbling ; it will be ready to widen the fissure, to spring into the gap between Germany and her Near Eastern allies and apply leverage to enlarge it.

We have got to beat the Germans in the West, but we must also be ready to seize instantly upon the first fruits of that victory in other fields, when they begin to appear in the form of wilting on the part of the Bulgars or Turks. For though we win in the

## **12 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY**

West we shall nevertheless lose the war for practical purposes unless we also stamp the Germans out of the Balkans. The greater must precede the less. Victory in the Balkans will come as a consequence and corollary of victory in France, but only if we are ready to seize with both hands upon the first signs of enemy enfeeblement. By so doing, too, we may be able to set up a reciprocal process of dismemberment that will react effectively upon the break-up of the German military power in the West, and so hasten the realisation of both the major and the minor victories.

It will be the function of the Allied Army in the Balkans always to hold itself ready for that vital opportunity.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRST FIGHTING AND THE FRENCH PUSH INTO SERBIA.

SEPTEMBER 30th, 1915, may be regarded as the day when the Salonica Expedition took its place among the war plans of the Allies.

During the two previous months the military situation in the Near East had been forcing itself more and more urgently upon the attention of the French and English Governments. At the Dardanelles the fierce fighting of the summer had only emphasised the deadlock in which the Allied Forces were involved. In the Balkans it became clearer as the autumn drew on that Austria was about to carry out an attack in overwhelming force upon the Serbians, who were already worn with much fighting and reduced in numbers by disease. Bulgaria's deceitful neutrality was wearing thin, in spite of the well meant but lamentably misinformed assurances of her friends in England that she would never forget the gratitude due to her traditional friends, the English, and would never ally herself against her kinsmen the Russians. For all the bluffing interviews given by M. Radoslavoff to the *Temps*, it was constantly growing more sure that the Bulgar's hatred of the Serb, and his resentment of the loss of the spoils of the first Balkan war which he had suffered by the Treaty of Bucharest, would finally bring him to league himself with the Central Empires,

## 14 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

to which his crafty and influential monarch by family and financial interest belonged.

When Bulgaria, on September 10th, 1915, at length ordered a general mobilisation, Serbia found herself threatened by imminent invasion from two sides of her kingdom. Meanwhile the Balkan Expedition was shaping in Paris. M. Millerand, Minister of War, sent for General Sarrail, who on July 22nd had returned to the capital from his command at Verdun, and asked him to submit a report on possible expeditions which might be undertaken in the Near East. He was to adopt as basis for his investigation the supposition, first, that the troops available would be limited to General Bailloud's French Division from the Dardanelles, reinforced by a Brigade from France; and, secondly, he was to report what might further be accomplished with larger effectives and what strength would be necessary to achieve more important ends.

During that late summer of 1915, then, when uneasiness was gradually spreading, both in England and in France, as to our situation in the Near East, when the heavy losses, the inability to advance, and the appearance of enemy submarines to threaten our communications at the Dardanelles were making it clearer every day that it was beyond our strength to force a way through to Constantinople, when Germany was clearly preparing for a powerful thrust southwards in the Balkans, to gain control of the railway line that would give her through communication with Constantinople, and still more imperil our situation in the Gallipoli Peninsula, General Sarrail, on whom the responsibility for the chief command of the Allies in the Balkans has rested for the last two years, was sitting shut up in his room in Paris, like a student preparing for an examination, in front of a large table covered with Staff maps, studying the possibilities of new diversions that



THE VOIVODE MISICH, G.C.M.C., GENERAL OF THE  
ROYAL SERBIAN ARMY, WITH THE GENERAL G. F.  
MILNE, C.B., D.S.O., COMMANDER IN CHIEF BRITISH  
SALONICA ARMY.



might be made in the Levant. There were several schemes that he had to investigate; they were being much discussed unofficially at the time, and each of them had its partisans.

Of these the plan of landing at Salonica found the most general favour because :

1. There was a good harbour there.
2. There were railways running up country.
3. The town disposed of a certain amount of modern resources.
4. An expeditionary force based on Salonica could be used either to supplant or to supplement the operations at the Dardanelles.
5. At this time (summer, 1915) the Greek Government under M. Venizelos was thoroughly pro-Ally, and, had the King not acted unconstitutionally later in driving him from office, there would have been a good chance of the Greek Army coming in with us.

But before the report which General Sarrail submitted could be studied by the French Government, the quick march of events in the Balkans imposed an immediate decision. On September 29th the Bulgars, without declaring war, attacked the Serbian frontier at Cadibogaz. For a week the Serbs had already been falling back from the Danube in the face of invading Austro-German forces half as strong again as themselves. If Serbia was to be saved from complete annihilation, Allied reinforcements must be sent to her at once. Strategical considerations made it urgent that anything possible should, in fact, be done to prevent a successful German invasion of Serbia. For this would make the dream of "Middle Europe" a temporary reality, would consolidate and immensely strengthen the situation of the Central Powers and their relations with their Allies, and would put Berlin in three-day railway communication with Constantinople, opening up to Germany the granary



## 18 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

of Asia Minor, and enabling trainloads of shells to reach the Turkish capital without breaking bulk between an Essen factory-yard and the Sirkedji railway station by the Golden Horn. Public opinion too, both in France and England, eagerly desired that something should be done to help Serbia. The idea that a little nation which had fought so gallantly should now be abandoned to an overwhelming invasion without an effort being made to save her was repugnant to the chivalrous feelings of the French and English nations. The French Press, especially, was urgent with demands that 400,000 men should be sent "at once" to the Balkans. The publicists who agitated for these energetic measures had not, however, paused to calculate the time necessary to concentrate such a number of troops, to organise their despatch, and above all to arrange sea-transport for them. The matter-of-fact truth is that at the end of September, 1915, when this Balkan campaign was undertaken, it was already too late to bring effective help to our Serbian Allies at the other end of Europe. The conditions were not equal. The invaders of Serbia had the whole of the resources of their highly organised industrial countries at a distance of only a few hours by train behind them, and they were already on the spot; while it remained for us, first to organise, and then to despatch an expedition which would have to be conveyed and supplied over thousands of miles of railway and sea.

But at the beginning of October the decision to launch the Balkan campaign had been reached; the Allies had been in negotiation with M. Venizelos, the Greek Premier, about landing at Salonica; the assent of the Greek Government had been obtained; and although Venizelos himself, through the opposition of the King, was shortly afterwards driven from office, and the co-operation of the Greek Army which

had once been hoped for was no longer in sight, the arrangement held good. The wheels that such resolutions set in motion are too complicated to be lightly stopped.

Speediness in the arrival of our troops in the Balkans was of the first importance. General Bailloud's French division from Cape Helles, and the 10th Division under General Sir Bryan Mahon from Suvla, were accordingly hurried over from the Dardanelles, and their first detachments landed at Salonica on October 5th. Other forces were to follow immediately from France. General Sarrail left on October 7th for Salonica, where he arrived on October 12th, but the haste with which this expedition for the rescue of Serbia had necessarily been organized was evident from the first. Twice during General Sarrail's voyage from Paris to Salonica his instructions as to the plan of campaign to be followed were changed. At the moment of his arrival the decision stood that the French Forces were to remain concentrated at Salonica, but forty-eight hours later, under the pressure of events, and in response to telegraphic reports and proposals received from General Sarrail himself, this scheme was altered, and permission was given to the French Commander to make an effort, desperate although the situation in Serbia by this time was, to push up the Vardar, and try to join hands with the Serbian Army where it stood at bay.

The troops now at Salonica available for this operation were :—

■ General Bailloud's Division (the 156th).

The 118th Brigade from France.

The 10th English Division from the Dardanelles.

Two more French divisions (the 57th, formed of the 118th Brigade and another which arrived, and the 122nd, from France) landed shortly afterwards

## 18 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

in time to follow up-country and play their part in the operations in Serbia.

The 10th English Division had come with orders from the British Government to establish itself for the winter in Salonica and not to cross the Greek frontier unless this was violated, but on the decision being reached that the French should push up into Serbia, General Mahon received authorisation from London to advance the 10th Division as far as Lake Doiran, just across the Greek frontier. Here he relieved the French who were holding the right wing of the Allied front, and protected the line of communications of the main French Force which had been pushed on and become engaged with the enemy eighty miles up the Vardar from Salonica. A suggestion that the English troops should instead proceed to the support of the Serbs in the Babouna Pass, by way of Monastir, was held to be too hazardous and far-distant an operation to be practicable. In addition the idea was opposed by the Greeks, who were already obstructing us as much as possible.

The principles upon which the French Government had decided upon the advance of its troops into Serbia were those of demonstrating to the Serbs, now in desperate straits, that the Allied Powers had not deserted them, and also of contributing some material help, however slight, to their outnumbered army. As regards the latter aim there were two ways in which this might be effected. The French troops might have been rushed up the railway to Nish directly each detachment of them arrived. This was the desire of the Serbian Government, and it was awaited by them with such confidence that the town of Nish in the second week of October was beflagged in expectation of the immediate arrival of the Allied reinforcements. Or, secondly, General Sarraill might have contented himself with occupying the Vardar

valley so as to protect Serbia's sole line of communications with the outside world. The considerations which governed the choice between these alternatives were, first, the time available to the Allies, and, second, the strength of the forces at their disposal. Of these, the first was so short, and the second so limited, that General Sarrail decided for the latter scheme—an advance up the Vardar valley to secure the railway line, and to threaten the flank of the invading Bulgars.

The reasons against hurrying the French troops right up the railway to Nish, nearly 200 miles distant from Salonica, were several. First of all the result would simply have been that the French divisions would have been engaged battalion by battalion as they arrived at Nish. Their strength was not sufficient for them to have made any considerable difference to the general situation, and in consequence of such action General Sarrail, instead of having under his own hand the force with the command of which the French Government had entrusted him, would have been obliged to transfer the practical authority over his troops to Serbian General Headquarters. The French Army would furthermore inevitably have become involved in the disastrous Serbian retreat across Albania which followed. Moreover by this time the very evident hostility of the Greek Government and the pro-German attitude of King Constantine made it necessary to take special heed of the safety of our lines of communication, and even of our base at Salonica. We were surrounded on all sides by the Greek Army on a war footing. Many of its officers openly showed preference for our enemies and we had always to bear in mind the possibility of a sudden and treacherous attack upon our rear.

On October 14th, then, the French advance north-

## 20 ' THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

wards up the Vardar began, with the limited objects of securing the railway, with the defiles and tunnels through which it passes, and of joining hands with the Serbs, if the development of their retreat should be such as to make that possible. On October 19th General Bailloud established his Headquarters at Strumnitza Station, and during the following week his Division began to drive the Bulgars back in the hilly region to the east of the line towards the Bulgarian frontier. The French occupied Tatarli, Kalkali, and the ridge to the north of these villages, thus securing a position which our 10th Division later took over from them. On October 26th the first detachments of this English Division began, indeed, to arrive on the sector between Dedeli and Lake Doiran.

During the first fortnight in November the French continued to be fairly actively engaged with the Bulgars in the right angle formed by the road running from Strumnitza Station to Strumnitza town—the two places being separated by a distance of twelve miles of mountain as the crow flies. In this sector, on November 11th, they took Hill 517, on which stands the village of Islaz, by a frontal infantry attack in three waves which carried two Bulgar positions in one rush.

So much for the right wing of our forces now established in as advanced a position as it was ever to reach. Meanwhile the left and more mobile wing of the Allied Army in the Balkans had pushed further north. Their advance up the railway line was made by successive stages, the first point north of Strumnitza Station that was occupied being the ravine of Demir Kapu. This was a most important place to secure, for here the railway and river are penned up together in a narrow gorge ten miles long, which acts as the neck of a bottle, restricting the main route of ingress into Southern Macedonia from the north.

The entrance to this ten-mile corridor is a narrow gap just wide enough for the brown, swirling river to pass between perpendicular walls of rock 200 feet high. The railway only gets through by tunnelling into the mountain alongside.

The Demir Kapu defile was, in fact, seized only just in time, for the Bulgars were already advancing to the river from the east. So quickly did they come on, in hot pursuit of some Serbian frontier guards, that they ran quite unexpectedly into some French outposts thrown out on the left bank of the river. The enemy was unable to establish a fixed position, however, to threaten the defile, and could only shell it irregularly with small mountain guns.

The next stage of Sarrail's up-river advance was to the town of Krivolak, which stands on the Vardar, twenty miles south-east of Veles, otherwise called Kuprulu. The first French Brigade arrived at Krivolak on October 20th.

Up to this date it had been General Sarrail's intention to go on to Veles, where the Serbian General Vasitch held out, though almost surrounded, until October 28th. The junction between the French and the Serbs at Veles, if it could have been brought about, as it might have been had the Allies landed in Salonica a fortnight earlier, would have changed the whole fate of the Serbian Army. Not only would it have secured to them a line of supply by rail from Salonica and the sea, but it would have kept open an avenue of retreat down which they might have fallen back without undue hardship on to our new Allied base, instead of being obliged, as they eventually were, to undertake that terrible and costly march across the pathless mountains of Albania through mid-winter snows.

But the lateness of the arrival of the Allied troops in the Balkans had laid a blight upon this scheme

## 22 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

which withered it utterly. Uskub had been taken on October 9th, after heavy fighting. Veles fell on the 28th. The cutting of the railway at these points, which severed the Serbian Government at Nish and the Serbian Armies in the valleys of the Southern and Western Morava, at Tetovo, and in the Babouna Pass, from all communication with the south, was the first great achievement of the Bulgarian invasion. It drove a wedge between the Serbians retiring south-westwards and the French advancing northwards up the Vardar to their succour. Was it still possible, in spite of the enemy forces thus thrust between them, for the junction between these two Allied Armies to be effected by fighting? Two attempts were made to accomplish this. Each was a forlorn hope, and neither met with success.

To begin with, it was clear that the French forces advancing up the Vardar were nothing like strong enough to re-take Veles so as to join the Serbians there. The possibilities of the limited number of troops which the French possessed were, in fact, exhausted. Two French divisions had reached Krivolak—the 57th and the 122nd. The third French Division, the 156th, was back down the Vardar at Strumnitza, engaged, together with the English, in ensuring the long line of communications of this small force. The idea of advancing from Krivolak upon the Bulgars at Veles was not to be thought of. It would have been to run upon sure disaster.

But if the French could not retake Veles from the Bulgars, could the Serbs do it?

The Serbs tried to in the first week of November. This attempt is known as "The manœuvre of Katchanik." It failed. To understand it without going into too complicated detail, it must be remembered that under the converging pressure of the Austrians

and Bulgarians the Serbian Army had now fallen back into the region west of Uskub, which, together with Veles, as has been said, was in the hands of the enemy.

This being the situation, it was clear that the only way for the Serbs to force their way through to join the Allies was to abandon Old Serbia and then, concentrating in the plain of Kossovo, to try to break through the enemy forces now posted from Katchanik along the Karadagh to Konculj, so as to reach Uskub and Veles behind them. To do this, as many troops as possible were withdrawn from the north, those in the valleys of the Southern and Western Morava being the first to be recalled. This retirement, though harassed by energetic pressure of the enemy from the north and from the direction of Le/kovec to the east, was rapidly and safely carried out, and on November 4th the push for Uskub began.

For this forlorn hope of an offensive the Serbs disposed of five infantry divisions, one cavalry division and two strong "detachments," but they were much outnumbered by the Bulgars facing them. The latter, threatened by this attack on their flank, delayed their advance towards Monastir down the Babouna pass, where for a month past five thousand Serbs, with practically no guns and little food, had been holding up four times their number of the enemy, and troops were even called back up the Babouna to meet the attack on Katchanik.

From November 4th-8th, in the battle of Katchanik, the Serbs were attacking the enemy on Velika Planina and Mount Jegovatz, the crest of which they captured. But their troops were tired out, they were short of mountain guns, and the enemy was pressing from the north towards Preopolatz and Prishtina. It became clear that there would not be time to force a way through to Uskub



## 24 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

before the communication of the troops at Kat-  
chanik broke down. So on November 8th the  
attack was called off, and the wearied Serbian Army,  
with its artillery ammunition exhausted, was with-  
drawn to the left bank of the Sitnitza river, and  
there on November 12th the order was finally given  
for that ghastly retreat to begin across the bitter  
and inhospitable mountains of Albania, which for  
the time, at any rate, was the end of the Serbian Army.

But though neither French nor Serbs were strong  
enough to break through and make a junction at  
Veles or Uskub there still remained another possi-  
bility. At the end of October, when the French reached  
Krivolak, there was still that small Serbian force in  
the narrow and steep defile of the Babouna pass  
along which the road from Veles runs to Monastir.  
The flank of this Serbian force was, indeed, threatened  
by a flying column of the Bulgars which was working  
round to turn its position by means of a pony track  
across the mountains to the north, and in the end  
did oblige it to retreat.

But on October 20th, when the French reached  
Krivolak, there still appeared to the energetic mind  
of General Sarrail to be a chance worth attempting  
of striking westwards across country from the Vardar  
and attacking the left flank of the Bulgar force advan-  
cing from Veles on Monastir in the hope of getting  
into touch with this detachment of the Serbian Army  
which was resisting in the Babouna pass. It was a  
daring scheme, almost reckless perhaps from a  
strategic point of view, that this weak force of two  
divisions with its long and most precarious line of  
communications should engage itself with a much  
more numerous and victoriously advancing enemy,  
and General Sarrail was constantly being cautioned  
by the French Government not only of his danger of  
being cut off and surrounded by the Bulgars, but also

of the vaguer and consequently even more disturbing possibility of being attacked from the rear by the Greeks, who controlled the first fifty miles of his railway communications and were by this time so frankly unfriendly that Sarraïl was driven to the length of establishing a great supply depot at Guevgheli, just across the Serbian frontier, for no other reason than that he could not be certain of the security of his base area further south. In fact, one needs only to glance at the map to realise the difficulty of the operation which the French now began to attempt. From their railhead at Krivolak, on the Vardar bank, to the Babouna pass, where the Serbs were standing on the defensive, is a distance of thirty miles across country, but that distance conveys small idea of the obstacles with which it was filled. After securing the railhead at Krivolak by establishing a strong outpost on the opposite bank of the Vardar, the French troops destined to attempt the junction with the Serbs had to turn their backs upon the railway and march by the single, primitive, up-and-down road that runs south-westwards, through Negotin and Kavadar, to where the long wooden bridge of Vozarci crossed the swift and deep Cerna river, a tributary stream which here flows north-eastwards to join the Vardar. The road of their advance continued for four miles further beyond the Cerna, up the valley of the Rajek, a mountain torrent that falls into it; then they had to cross the Rajek by another wooden bridge and turn due northward along the left bank of the Cerna, where they climbed up into the outer fringe of the mountains that form the eastern wall of the Babouna pass. And here at length they found themselves in face of the entrenched positions of the left wing of the Bulgarian Army that was pushing its way down the road from Veles to Monastir.

## 26 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

A single-track railway a hundred miles long, threatened by open enemies on the greater part of its length and exposed to secret enemies on the rest, followed by eighteen or twenty miles of a bad road which included two wooden bridges across formidable rivers—such was their sole line of supply and their sole line of retreat. Under these conditions was the French advance westwards from the Vardar through Kavadar begun.

The first thing for the French to do after their arrival on October 20th at Krivolak was to cross the river and secure the commanding height of Kara-Hodjali on the other side, from which, if the enemy had been allowed to establish artillery there, he could have shelled the whole of the "Kavadar triangle," the sort of peninsula between the converging Vardar and Cerna rivers across which lay the line of advance towards the Babouna.

No sooner did General Leblois, commanding the 57th Division, arrive at Krivolak on October 27th, than he gave orders for this position of Kara-Hodjali to be occupied as a northerly bastion to the new French area of operations on the right bank of the Vardar. There is no bridge across the river here, and the Vardar, always a swift stream, was carrying a strong head of flood-water, but there was time for no delay, since already Bulgar cavalry scouts had been seen dotting the crest of the black forbidding mountain. So a leaky Turkish fishing-punt was found, and a whole French regiment with a mountain-battery were taken across in it, a dozen at a time, the crazy ferry-boat never ceasing its journeys for a day and a night. Meanwhile a company of Irish pioneers was brought up from Salonica to build a floating bridge.

But the Bulgar General realised, though late, the importance of Kara-Hodjali as a menace to the new

French position south of Krivolak, and on October 30th he attacked it in force, supported by 5-inch guns. The attack was beaten off with heavy loss, though the Bulgarian infantry got close enough to the French trenches for the defenders to use their hand-grenades. On November 2nd and 3rd renewed attempts to outflank Kara-Hodjali were repulsed and after that the Bulgars contented themselves with digging in to face the French. Railhead in its exposed position at Krivolak was never safe from a few shells at long range, but it was protected from actual attack so long as the French continued to hold Kara-Hodjali, or "Kara-Rosalie," as the French soldiers called it, giving it the nickname of their blood-reddened bayonets from the hand-to-hand fighting that took place there.

It was a mountain even less attractive than the average stony, barren, treeless Macedonian height, for its ravines were filled with skulls and bones from the last Balkan wars—whitened relics of which the story, though but three years old, was already lost except in the archives of some General Staff—a grim reminder of the ephemeral motives for which war demands the surrender of men's lives.

But before the French abandoned Kara-Hodjali a month later they had added considerably to its collection of human remains by the Bulgarian corpses they scattered on its slopes, for the Bulgars moved always in column and attacked in mass-formation, as a result of which they lost heavily. But the French also had meanwhile the opportunity of realising the devastating effects of their own 75-mm. guns, since the batteries which the Bulgars used against them were some which they had bought from Creusot before the war. The enemy's shells, however, varied much in quality, Turkish ammunition and even practice shells being sometimes used. The Bulgars

## 28 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

had no aeroplanes at this time though a few German machines showed themselves over the French and British by Strumnitza. The Bulgar gunners, on the other hand, always stopped firing when an Allied airman appeared.

Railhead being thus secured, the main body of the French turned westwards to attack the left flank and rear of the Bulgars operating against the Babouna pass. By this time the 57th Division had established its headquarters at Negotin, and the 122nd at Kavadar.

A dreary place was this "Kavadar triangle"—almost treeless; the once fertile fields deserted; the rare villages in ruins, burnt by the comitadji bands which used to ravage the Balkans in the interests of conflicting national propaganda. The wretched population was the usual mixture of Bulgarian, Serb and Mussulman, but with each section accustomed to change their racial and religious labels under the application of terrorism. Order was kept among them with a strong hand by an ex-comitadji named Babounski, who made short work of doubtful characters, hanging them or "sending them down to Salonika," as he euphemistically termed it, which meant a summary execution on the banks of the Vardar, after which the body was thrown into the stream. Mud, filth, half-wild dogs were the most conspicuous features of the countryside. No supplies of any kind could be drawn from a region whose resources even in the way of fuel were limited to cakes of bullock dung, dried by being stuck on to the decaying walls.

On November 5th news was received that the Serbs had been driven back halfway down the Babouna pass to Mukos. Time pressed; that same day the first French troops were ordered to cross the Cerna, and make a strong reconnaissance of the

slopes of Mount Archangel, the strongest point of the Bulgars' left flank, and held by the 8rd Macedonian Regiment reinforced by the 49th and 53rd and probably by one other.

\* For the next fortnight there was constant and desperate fighting along a front of ten miles on the slopes on this left bank of the Cerna. The dull rumble of the Bulgarian guns shelling the Serbs in the Mukos defile, only ten miles away in a direct line, came rolling through the mountains to the ears of the French as they tramped across the long wooden trestle bridge over the Cerna at Vozarci. The whole question was—could the French fight their way through, in time to join these Serbs before the latter, vastly outnumbered, were driven back into the Prilep plain behind them towards Monastir? The hope that this might be done proved vain, through sheer lack of numbers on the part of both the Allies. But not for want of fierce fighting during the fortnight from November 5th-19th. One French regiment, indeed, was continuously in action for nine days. On November 10th the village of Cicevo, on the slopes of Mount Archangel, was carried with a rush by an encircling attack delivered by a French infantry regiment. Battalion by battalion, as French troops arrived up the railway line, they were hurried across the Kavadar triangle to the other bank of the Cerna and thrown into the fighting.

On the 13th and 14th the conflict reached its greatest violence. Even these French divisions coming straight from the Western front had never heard such violent rifle and artillery fire as during those two sternly contested days. As for the Bulgars, prisoners who had fought in the last two Balkan wars said that they had never realised before how terrible a battle could be. But by this time the offensive had passed to the enemy. The

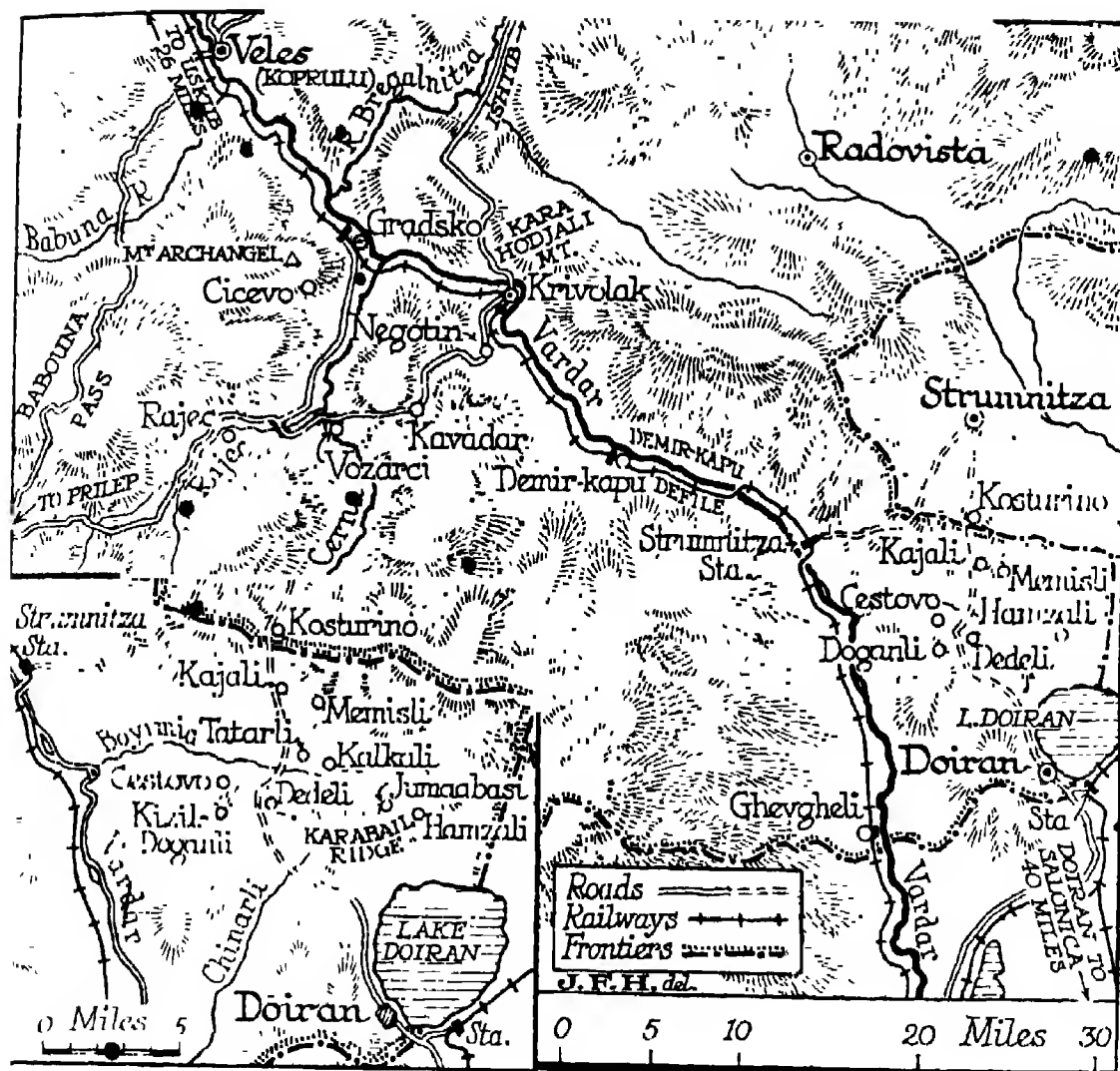
## 80 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

French had exhausted their strength, they had failed to carry Mount Archangel, and on the evening of the 18th the *Chasseurs à pied* evacuated Cicevo, which they had won.

The French, though unable to break through the Bulgars to join the Serbs, nevertheless proved formidable in defence. At one point the Bulgars following them down the slopes of Mount Archangel got to within twenty yards of trenches held by the *Chasseurs*. Then with a fierce yell and cries of "The knife!" they rose to their feet to charge. But the *Chasseurs* had made steps of earth ready to get quickly over their parapet, and in a second they, too, were out of their trench and rushing forward to meet the enemy with the bayonet. The suddenness of this counter-movement took the Bulgars by surprise; they hesitated an instant, then broke and ran. "If we had only had one fresh brigade then," sighed an officer who was there, "we might have been at Veles that night."

The Bulgars made persistent attempts to work round the left flank of the French and cut them off from the Vozarci bridge. If they had succeeded in this they would have caught in a trap all the French troops who had crossed the Cerna, rolling them up against the unfordable river in their rear. Failing in these attempts, however, their attack lost much of its vigour, and they seemed content with having checked the French push towards joining the Serbs. The French losses were not very great, though the proportion of officer casualties was high, but the Bulgars left 3,500 dead on the ground after the fighting on Mount Archangel alone.

The French were hopelessly outnumbered, the Bulgars having a superiority of five to two. By the end of the second week of November two and a half Bulgarian divisions were facing the two weak French



THE REGION OF THE ALLIED ADVANCE INTO SERBIA AUTUMN 1915. INSET: THE SCENE OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE "A DIVISION."



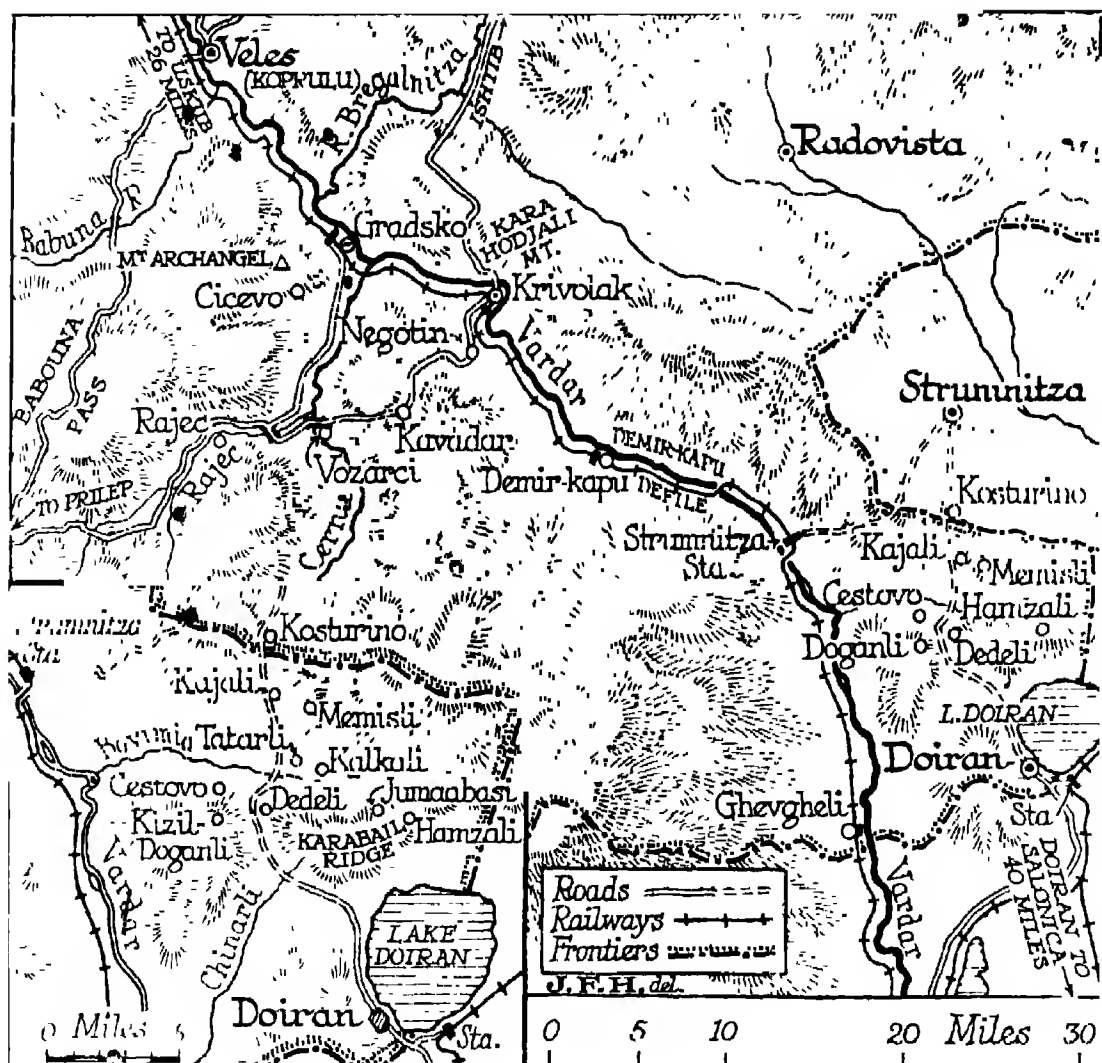
## 80 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

French had exhausted their strength, they had failed to carry Mount Archangel, and on the evening of the 13th the *Chasseurs à pied* evacuated Cicevo, which they had won.

The French, though unable to break through the Bulgars to join the Serbs, nevertheless proved formidable in defence. At one point the Bulgars following them down the slopes of Mount Archangel got to within twenty yards of trenches held by the *Chasseurs*. Then with a fierce yell and cries of "The knife!" they rose to their feet to charge. But the *Chasseurs* had made steps of earth ready to get quickly over their parapet, and in a second they, too, were out of their trench and rushing forward to meet the enemy with the bayonet. The suddenness of this counter-movement took the Bulgars by surprise; they hesitated an instant, then broke and ran. "If we had only had one fresh brigade then," sighed an officer who was there, "we might have been at Veles that night."

The Bulgars made persistent attempts to work round the left flank of the French and cut them off from the Vozarci bridge. If they had succeeded in this they would have caught in a trap all the French troops who had crossed the Cerna, rolling them up against the unfordable river in their rear. Failing in these attempts, however, their attack lost much of its vigour, and they seemed content with having checked the French push towards joining the Serbs. The French losses were not very great, though the proportion of officer casualties was high, but the Bulgars left 3,500 dead on the ground after the fighting on Mount Archangel alone.

The French were hopelessly outnumbered, the Bulgars having a superiority of five to two. By the end of the second week of November two and a half Bulgarian divisions were facing the two weak French



THE REGION OF THE ALLIED ADVANCE INTO SERBIA AUTUMN 1915 INSET THE SCENE OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE "A DIVISION"



divisions on the Cerna front, and a Bulgar division counts no less than 25,000 men. It was believed, in fact, that the whole of the Bulgarian First Army, about 125,000 men, were spread along the Veles-Prilep road, and available to be used against the 25,000 French on the Cerna, and the 5,000 Serbs who were gradually being pushed down the Babouna pass.

So the attempt to join the Serbs had failed; it had broken against the Bulgar positions on Mount Archangel. All that was now left to do was to retreat upon Salonica, leaving the Serbs to their fate. For the French to stay where they were, at the end of so difficult a line of communications, threatened by the Bulgars, and seeming very likely also to be attacked by the Greeks, was clearly impossible. Indeed, it looked by no means sure in the third week of November that the French would be able to extricate themselves from their contact with the enemy by the one difficult route open to them, without considerable loss.

It was impossible to withdraw troops, ammunition, and material in a single movement. If that had been attempted, the enemy would have followed up and forced the French to stand and fight on ground not of their own choosing. The retirement was accordingly carried out by stages. An appearance of activity was kept up at the front, while a series of strong entrenched positions was prepared at intervals down the Vardar. Each of these "bridge-heads," as they are technically called, was held and defended by a section of the French force, while the rest were being withdrawn to the shelter of the next one. It was a retreat by echelon. These defensive positions, thus held in turn to guard the rear of the retreating army, were:

- (1) Defile of Demir Kapu.

## 32 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

- (2) The heights of Gradec.
- (3) Boimia river—Mirovca.
- (4) Near Guevgheli.
- (5) Smol (north-west of Ardzan lake).

The force which General Sarraïl had to bring out of Serbia in this difficult manner was two divisions strong. It must be remembered how awkwardly the French troops on the Cerna were situated with regard to getting back to their railhead at Krivolak. This has already been explained. And when that was accomplished even worse lay ahead. From Krivolak down to Salonica there was no road possible for wheeled traffic at all. The only means of communication was the single line of railway, and a few extremely bad, very steep and rough tracks which could be used by men on foot and by pack-animals only. To add to these difficulties, it was now bitterly cold, with twenty degrees of frost, and the snow lying thick.

The first thing to be done was to evacuate the large depot of supplies and munitions which had been built up at Krivolak. There had been accumulated here, in view of the possibility of joining up with the Serbs, eight days' supply of food for the two divisions and 1,000 rounds per gun. To facilitate the feeding of the Army, Gradsko, the next station north of Krivolak, had also by this time been occupied, but on the approach of the Bulgars was evacuated, because its retention was not considered worth the casualties that its defence would have entailed. Owing to the absence of roads, all the carts, motor-lorries, and other material, wheeled and stationary, used in the Kavadar triangle had to be brought down from Krivolak by train. When this had been done, and the prepared defensive position at Demir Kapu had been occupied by troops drawn from the 156th Division at Strumnitza, the

retirement of the troops fighting the Bulgars beyond the Cerna, could begin. By November 29th they were all back on the right bank of that river, blowing up the bridge at Vozarci behind them.

All that day the artillery continued a violent bombardment of the Bulgar positions in the hills beyond the Cerna, and during the night following the whole French force fell back on Krivolak and entrained, leaving only small rearguards which followed as soon as the Krivolak railhead was cleared. This first stage of the retreat was carried out with a loss of only about twenty men. The Bulgars were slow, as they usually are, in grasping the new situation, and the whole of the two divisions got safely back behind the fortified position of Demir Kapu. But when the Bulgars did come on, they followed up the retirement with stubborn persistency. I had a good account of their advance about six weeks later from a Bulgarian corporal, born of Armenian parents at Rustchuk, who deserted later. He had been engaged in a fight for the possession of the Rajec bridge beyond the Cerna, which I had witnessed from the French side on November 19th. The bridge across the Cerna at Vozarci having been blown up, he told me, the Bulgars first tried to throw a temporary pontoon bridge across, but the swift current carried it away, so the Bulgarians actually crossed the Cerna by wading, though the rapid stream ran breast-high, and it was snowing heavily at the time. They even forded it by night, each man holding his rifle above his head with one hand, and gripping the shoulder of his neighbour with the other. Out of the regiment to which this deserter belonged twenty men were swept away and drowned that night in the fast-flowing, icy-cold water. The strength of the force that followed up the French, he, as a simple non-commissioned officer, did not

## 84 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

know, but he believed that there were three Bulgarian divisions available which had been opposing the French beyond the Cerna. They found the Kavadar triangle an empty waste of snow and slush, for the French had made good their retreat to Demir Kapu. The Bulgars, to whom the rigours of a Balkan winter caused less suffering than to their opponents, tramped relentlessly after them. From the Cerna to Demir Kapu they were thirty-six hours on the march without sleep and without rations. After their soaking in the bitter Cerna their officers no doubt feared frostbite among the troops were they to halt for long. The men begged bread in the wretched, half-depopulated villages through which they passed. And if it was not given immediately they took it, together with anything else portable that seemed worth looting.

The Bulgarian guns could not, owing to the state of the primitive road, keep up with this rate of march, and the French artillery posted on the Demir Kapu position accordingly caused the enemy considerable loss when they reached it. A violent infantry attack was nevertheless made on the Demir Kapu trenches, but the French beat it off, and gave time for their main body to get back, though in great apprehension of being outflanked by a Bulgarian movement through the mountains, into the next "watertight compartment" at Gradec, and so to Strumnitza station. The Bulgars, following on, next attacked the Gradec position, the defence of which cost the French 100 men. The two French divisions which had been up country were now in the area occupied by the 156th Division, part of which withdrew across the Bojimia river, where it took up a defensive position, in relation with another fortified "bridgehead" at Mirovca, on the right bank of the Vardar.

But as the French thus steadily fell back, the conditions of their retreat, desperately hard as they were already rendered by the deep snow, the bitter cold, the fog, and the unspeakable mud and slush, became more difficult in proportion as the numbers of the retiring force were augmented through its being withdrawn upon itself. For the available routes remained limited to the railway and to adjacent tracks, such as would be considered impossible in Europe. Motor-cars sank to the axles, and could only make progress at all with the aid of constant tows from double teams of bullocks, fortunately plentiful in the country. Limbers and wagons were bogged in every dip of the ground, and the mules harnessed to them would often grow fractious and refuse to continue the weary struggle. So bad were the conditions that the 57th Division took a whole day to cover four miles. The men, sinking ankle-deep in mud at every step, were dead-tired, staggering under the weight of their packs, wet to the skin, starved with cold and hunger; they had been marching and fighting for days in the snow over rough, steep paths high up the rocky side of the Vardar gorge where a slip meant death, often sleeping such sleep as they could get shelterless in the open. They were covered with lice. For a fortnight they had not had their boots off or washed even their faces. Like all armies of spirit, they were disheartened by the fact that they were retreating, although it was a retirement that carried with it no disgrace. Nor were the inhabitants of some of the villages they passed through friendly in their reception. Long experience of wars—regular and irregular—has filled the population of the Balkans with terror and dread of armies on the march. Moreover, the Turkish and Bulgarian sections of the population of Macedonia were naturally hostile to their coun-



## 86 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

tries' retreating enemies. In more than one village straggling French soldiers were found murdered with their eyes and tongue torn out by the frenzied women of the place.

And now Strumnitza station, one of the most important depots on the line, with its accumulated heaps of supplies and ammunition, its strings of limbers, its parks of carts and waggons of every kind requisitioned in the country, had to be evacuated during the night, while all troops were pushed on south of the new entrenched position astride the Vardar from Mirovca to the Bojimia valley. In front of this position the Vardar leaves its mountain ravine and enters upon a flatter tract of country, so that the ground became more favourable for the pursuing enemy's attacks. Violent fighting took place here, as the Bulgars attempted to turn the flanks of this line of defence, while the French were improvising yet another position near Guevgheli, to protect the evacuation of the large depot of stores and Serbian supplies which had been collected there, because of the apparent likelihood of the interference by the Greeks with the railway to Salonica further south.

There was a large military hospital, too, at Guevgheli, full of wounded, and with the limited rolling-stock which was all that the Greeks could be persuaded to provide it seemed very doubtful whether all these men and material could be got away in time. Guevgheli railway bridge, one of the principal engineering works on the line from Salonica to Nish, was mined ready to be blown up just as the ruined one alongside it had been blown up in the Balkan War three years before. Unceasingly the plodding files of men passed over, hustling along with them many of the little country donkeys which they had picked up on the retreat to carry cooking pots and part of their heavy packs. The donkeys sometimes

jibbed at the sight of the rushing stream below. When this happened there was no time either to persuade or to drive them. The way must not be blocked for a moment. Over into the river, 20 feet down, with a splash and a squeal, donkey, kit and all had to go and be swept away by the remorseless Vardar. There were strings of rickety carts half a mile long; here a convoy of ambulance waggons; there a train of artillery limbers. Staff cars bumped violently over the harder sections of the road or ploughed with boiling radiators through the swampy parts, throwing out fountains of mud on both sides. Flocks of sheep and goats straggled along, being saved from the Bulgar. There were the incessant blocks that always occur when the multitudinous traffic of an army is thus congested. Sometimes, in the crossing of a swollen stream, horses and cart would sink hopelessly into a patch of bottomless mud; the load would have to be hurriedly transferred to another already over-burdened waggon and the struggling team abandoned to gradual suffocation unless a kindly driver shot them before going on. Everyone was wet, weary, thoroughly fed up. Yet the French soldier, thanks perhaps to his safety-valve of picturesque and blood-curdling oaths, kept up his spirits, as he usually does on every occasion, however miserable, and seized on the smallest excuse for a laugh, though it were only at his own misfortunes.

The difficulties of the retreat were not at all lessened by the fact that the working of the two railways which brought the Allies down from the Greek frontier was in the hands of Greek officials, thanks to which a train ran off the line at a critical moment and considerably hampered our use of the railway. No one was hurt, which was a suspicious circumstance, and the event furthermore occurred at the

## 88 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

same spot as a similar incident in the Balkan War, so that there was some justification for strong suspicion of deliberate obstruction by the Greeks.

On the last night at Guevgheli the scene was one characteristic of the terrors of war. The town had already been set on fire, and the big barracks were blazing. The red light flashed back fitfully from the eddying Vardar. It was raining. • The tail-end of the bedraggled procession of the retreating army was still defiling across the river and on into the mire and the black night beyond. Behind it the rifles and machine-guns of the rearguard rattled without pause. The Bulgarian deserter with whom I later had several conversations was in the forefront of the pursuit and described it to me graphically. "The French guns," he said, "did great damage to the Bulgars at Guevgheli; for our own artillery was following on behind, much delayed by the snow. My regiment was advancing in column, not knowing that the French were so near, when their batteries suddenly opened fire. We should all have been killed if we had not been partly hidden from the French gunners by the mulberry trees at the side of the road, which screened us. At Guevgheli we were in so bad a way that even our officers were ready to order a retirement, and when we saw that the French were retreating still further across the Greek frontier we were so astonished that at first we thought it was a ruse. The rifle and machine-gun fire of the French was very deadly for us, too," he said. "We could see the French mitrailleuses in the open and our officers were discussing the chances of rushing them, but they lacked the confidence when it came to the point. The fight lasted five hours, and only finished after dark. When at last we advanced beyond Guevgheli a general order was given that we were

to halt at the Greek frontier. At this we were overjoyed and said, 'The war is over.'

"Five or six days passed so, and then we began to talk about Salonica. The rumour was that we were waiting for German reinforcements who were to go on and take Salonica and then hand it over to the Bulgarians. But when a whole fortnight had passed and we were still in billets at Gurincet, near Guevgheli, often bombed by French aeroplanes, and on very short rations—half a pound of bread a day and very little meat—we began to grumble and say, 'Where are the Germans?' Food got shorter and shorter. The soldiers stole each other's bread and so fighting began. Bread was as precious as diamonds. Those that were wise ate their ration directly they got it, or they would be attacked and have it taken from them. At last my regiment was ordered to furnish the frontier guard, and I, as a corporal, went out on rounds and so got a chance of slipping away."

When the last train had cleared Guevgheli of its wounded and stores, the order was given to the French to retire across the Greek frontier, and under the final protection of a mixed brigade at Smol the exhausted troops back from the Cerna completed their arduous but successful issue from so many and great dangers, and were withdrawn by railway and by all available tracks to what is now the line of the defences of Salonica. Meanwhile, the 156th Division on the left bank of the Vardar had been heavily engaged under much the same conditions as those described in the account which follows in the next chapter of the retreat of the 10th Division and had fallen back by a parallel route.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE BULGAR ATTACK ON THE 10TH DIVISION.

I HAVE related in the last chapter how, a few days after the landing at Salonica, it had been agreed between the French and British commanders that the British contingent of the Balkan Expeditionary Force should act in support of the French. Accordingly, the 30th Brigade of the 10th Division, in the last week of October, moved up from Salonica to Guevgheli, on the Vardar at the Greco-Serbian frontier, and marched through Bogdanci by the Chenali river to Dedeli. After concentrating there this brigade took up a position facing north between the villages of Tatarli and Robrovo, with the French holding the range of hills just in front of them, while they were encamped at its foot in second line. The two other brigades of the 10th Division shortly afterwards followed the 30th and encamped on the Doiran-Dedeli road.

On November 20th-21st, however, the 10th Division took over the line in front of them which the French had hitherto held, and thus British troops came for the first time face to face with the Bulgars. The position which these Irishmen were now holding formed the right of the Allied Balkan front, of which the left wing, composed entirely of French, was thrown much in advance, having for a month past been pushed far up the Vardar, and

## 42 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

become heavily engaged with the Bulgars<sup>c</sup> on the Cerna.

The sector for which we thus became responsible lay in the heart of a steep, confused, rocky mass of mountains between Kostorina and Lake Doiran. From Kostorina, where we linked up with the French, to just west of Memisli, our line was held by the 30th Brigade, which consisted of the 6th and 7th Dublins and the 6th and 7th Munster Fusiliers. Memisli village, including an important advanced position 800 yards north of it, known as Rocky Peak (Piton Rocheux), which was later to be the fulcrum of the Bulgar attack against us here, was held by the 31st Brigade, who had the 5th and 6th Inniskillings and the 5th and 6th Irish Fusiliers. Their line ran as far as Prstan. The 29th Brigade on the extreme right (10th Hampshires, 5th Connaught Rangers, Irish Rifles, Leinsters) had detached two battalions to reinforce the 30th Brigade. The rest of it was echeloned in the rear of the two forward brigades on the ridge above Humzali and Jumaabasi.

Comparatively peaceful conditions prevailed on the front of this new British position until the end of November. The Bulgars seemed to be content to mask us with a skeleton force. To reach our lines from Salonica you took the train and arrived at Doiran four hours later. Nineteen miles of good motoring-road led on from the station to Dedeli, where Divisional Headquarters were. You passed through Doiran town, skirting the edge of the broad, shining lake, and then gradually climbed up the wide valley north-westwards—how often since one has sat on the hills east of Doiran and watched the enemy's transport coming down that same road!

Dedeli itself is a characteristic Turkish village of unpaved lanes and alleys filled with loose boulders. Its low, two-storied houses, each in a little compound

## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION 48

of its own, are the kind of dwelling you find all over Macedonia. The lower rooms are dank, earth-floored stables or storehouses, where the winter's supply of Indian corn is kept. A ramshackle outside wooden staircase leads up to a broad verandah on the upper floor. You need to walk gingerly, for half the planks are loose. Off this open the two or three rooms that make up the dwelling. These, when they have been cleaned with the vigour which the British soldier puts into such operations, when years' old accumulation of filth has been scraped off the floor and burnt, and when walls and ceiling have been whitewashed, become quite tolerably habitable. The half-dome fireplace, indeed, reminds one rather of modern villa architecture at home. The furniture, if any, is of the roughest, but the roofs of these cottages are generally sound and the soldier asks no more. It is always astonishing to observe the resourcefulness and zeal with which army batmen will manufacture tables, chairs, washstands, bookcases, for their officers. They "scrounge" the material somehow under the most improbable circumstances, and are amply rewarded for hours of labour in what might have been their own spare time by a casual remark of their "boss." "Oh, by the way, Jenkins, the Colonel liked that armchair you knocked together for me, when he was in here to-day. He wants to know if you can't make one like it for him." And yet all their labour is of no more than temporary service. When the battalion moves on these products of ingenious carpentry must be left behind. With four officers' kits to go in one half-limber there is no room for chairs. But where would you find such energy in peace time? If a castor came off a sofa would your butler, at 30s. a week all found, put it on again for you? If he noticed you had nowhere to keep your smoking things, would he sit up at



## 44 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

night in his pantry carving you a pipe-rack? Yet your batmen, at half-a-sovereign a month, will improvise you a bed or a bath-tub as cheerfully as he brings your morning tea. War is a great energiser. As soon as British troops on campaign arrive in a new place they start improving it. I suppose the dry torrent-beds of Macedonia have been used as roads by its inhabitants for thousands of years, yet until the British came in 1915, not a man of all the dozen races that have lived there thought of moving a single boulder out of the way to give pack-horses easier passage. If it is the right season our men plant gardens. If it is winter-time they lay out neat little paths all up and down the mountain-sides with a regular edging of white stones. They make the wilderness look almost ridiculously tidy, like a wild man of the woods with his hair brushed back and parted.

The 10th Divisional Headquarters at Dedeli overlooked the half-mile broad valley of the Bojimia river, whose bed, however, was a dry waste of sand and rocks. Cotton, hemp, mulberry trees, withered vestiges of the inevitable Indian corn, witnessed to the fertility of the district whose inhabitants had been driven away by the approach of hostilities—a kind of migration to which, as Macedonians, they were thoroughly accustomed. On the ridge on the far side of the Bojimia valley our entrenched positions lay, and a short walk eastwards along the river-bed took you to Tatarli, where the General Commanding the 31st Brigade had his headquarters. The Bulgarians were understood to hold a line of trenches, block-houses and sangars along the ridge parallel to ours. It was estimated that there were about 10,000 of them spread out between the Greek frontier and Strumnitza, and believed to belong to the 2nd Philipopolis Division. Deserters would come in

## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION 45

voluntarily in little bodies. They complained of shortage of food in the enemy lines. One sheep had to be divided between 250 men. They were generally men between 25 and 35 and seemed to be townspeople. One drew a good contour map to explain how he had come ; another mended the watches of the Divisional Headquarters Staff. They were eager to show that they had not fired their rifles. One deserter had taken off his tunic to make him less likely to be shot at.

A rough ride of four miles took you from Dedeli to the headquarters of the 30th Brigade at Cadjali. The French on November 3rd had driven the Bulgars up the broad dry Cadjali ravine along which one passed, and through the village above. It had been a stiff action and the Bulgars lost out of one battalion alone 350 men. The French then had occupied the crest above Cadjali and the Bulgars the next one across a valley about 1,400 yards broad, where their main position was on Hill 850. While the French were laboriously building up their new line and had still only prised elementary trenches a few feet deep out of the rocky ground, with no wire in front of them at all, the Bulgars attacked on the night of November 16th with an energy which was a foreshadowing of that which they displayed a month later against ourselves. Creeping down the gullies on their side of the valley wearing their opinskis, a native sandal of untanned leather, and climbing noiselessly the rough variegated slopes which led up to the French positions, they made a determined effort to rush them, and failing in the first onslaught, flung themselves down, a bare forty yards from their adversaries, where from behind the meagre protection of "scrapes" of earth hurriedly thrown up they poured in a point-blank rifle fire, to the violence of which the piles of empty cartridge-cases lying by each individual position was

## 46. THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

evidence that still remained when we got there. But the attack failed and the Bulgars left 800 dead behind them.

The line which the 80th Brigade set themselves to dig, on taking over this position, lay along the ridge just below the crest. The ground was of unrelenting rock, so hard to work that the French had chiefly relied on sangars or stone redoubts, but these being liable to splinter under shell-fire, the 80th Brigade did not occupy them, leaving them empty to draw the enemy's artillery. On this brigade front as on that of its neighbour there was no action at all during November, the only losses being caused by an unlucky Bulgar shell which fell in a group of Dublin Fusiliers, killing nine and wounding a dozen.

But while these Irish Brigades were still imperfectly installed on the barren, inhospitable Dedeli ridge, they were savagely smitten by that cruel three-day blizzard which caused bitter suffering to our troops not only in the Balkans but at the Dardanelles. It began on November 27th with torrents of rain which soon turned to snow. Then it froze so quickly that the drenched skirts of greatcoats would stand out stiff like a ballet-dancer's dress. Even down at Strumnitza station in the valley 7·6° below zero Fahrenheit was registered, and up on that exposed knife-edge ridge where our trenches were the biting wind made the cold more piercing still. The men had no shelter but waterproof sheets pegged across the top of the open trench and the weight of accumulated snow soon broke those in. They had had no time to make dugouts in the rocky mountain side, and if they had had time they had no materials.

In that terrible weather our patrols and those of the Bulgars which used both to visit the unoccupied village of Ormanli would be driven to shelter and light fires in houses so close together that each could



*Official Photograph.*

BRITISH MOUNTAIN GUN IN ACTION



## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION 47

hear the other talking, and each by tacit agreement left the other undisturbed. It was too cold to fight.

There were 750 cases of frostbite in one brigade alone during those three fierce days, when it seemed as if the Balkan winter were showing the worst of which it was capable. Men frozen stiff were carried in scores from the trenches to the first-aid posts to be rubbed back to life again. Warm under-clothing reached the division in the very middle of the snow-storm, but the cold was too bitter for the men to undress to put it on, and it was added anyhow to the sacks and blankets and other additional garments that each did his best to accumulate, a pair of drawers being used as a muffler or tied round the middle.

It must be remembered, too, that the men of the 10th Division were already in poor physical condition when this severe ordeal came upon them. They looked worse indeed than they had at Suvla. The faces of most of them were yellow and wizened and their bodies thin. The trying climate of the Gallipoli Peninsula had sapped their strength.

On December 1st the 6th Munsters and 6th Dublin Fusiliers of the 30th Brigade had suffered so much by cold that they were relieved in the front line by the 5th Connaught Rangers and the 10th Hampshires of the 29th Brigade.

It was on December 4th that the Bulgars' artillery fire began to be better directed and concentrated; and the fact became evident that they had received reinforcements. On December 5th they started an attack on the French upon our left to the west of the Doiran-Strumnitza road. Meanwhile their activity against us increased and small parties of Bulgars began to creep up the little nullahs towards our front line and open rifle fire. The weather since December 2nd had become extremely foggy.

To meet the increased Bulgar artillery activity,

## 48 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

two batteries of field guns had been man-handled with great difficulty to a position 1,000 yards south of Memisli. These were the guns that had later to be abandoned in the retreat. It was only by the hardest labour that wheeled guns were ever got up to such a position at all, but we had no mountain artillery, and unless this step had been taken we should have been without reply to the enemy's shelling. There was a working party of 100 men told off to get the guns away had there been time, but to move some of them it was necessary to go out in front of the position and even then it was calculated that two days' careful work would have been required to withdraw them.

At length, on the afternoon of December 6th, the Bulgar attack on the 10th Division began. Eight hundred yards north of Memisli was the advanced post known as Rocky Peak. The effect of our occupying this had been to deny to the enemy artillery access to the right flank of the 30th Brigade. The hill had originally been held by a battalion of Irish Fusiliers. But there was no cover there; it was nothing but a treeless, shelterless, boulder-strewn height, and the battalion had suffered so severely during the blizzard in that isolated position that it was withdrawn and only one company and one machine-gun were left to hold it. In their first attack on Rocky Peak, in the afternoon of December 6th, the Bulgars captured a small trench, but later were driven out and off the hill again.

During the same night, however, they crept along the ravines that surrounded the isolated peak and carried it by storm at 5.30 on the morning of December 7th. About thirty of our troops holding it were captured; the rest got away. This loss gave the enemy a serious footing in our line, for the Bulgars brought up mountain artillery and machine-guns

## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION 49

on to Rocky Peak and began to enfilade the front of the 30th Brigade, which was also bombarded from the other side by field-gun batteries at Cepelli. The 30th Brigade had a line which made a salient, and was thus considerably exposed, and it became clear that they were to be the object of the main Bulgar attack. During the night of December 6th-7th two attacks were also made on the trenches of the Connaughts on Kotorino ridge by largely superior forces of Germans and Bulgars, but these were driven off, and all night long the artillery bombardment, strangely muffled by the fog, continued with enough severity to hinder supplies from reaching the trenches.

Only gradually was it realised that the hitherto passive Bulgars were about to make an attack in force upon our right. General Mahon, who was at 30th Brigade Headquarters on the morning of the 7th, had asked General Sarraill to expedite as much as possible the retreat—which was now in full progress under most difficult conditions—of the French contingent down the Vardar. An air reconnaissance had reported no signs of Bulgar reinforcements arriving on our front, but this was due no doubt to the prevailing fog. The converging artillery fire upon the 30th Brigade front was now becoming very severe and causing heavy losses to the 10th Hampshires and 5th Connaughts. The Connaughts were holding a salient which was in fact too big for them, and the Bulgars began massing for an attack in some dead ground 600 yards in advance of their trenches, where our artillery could not reach them. At 2.40 p.m. this attack was launched in mass on 600 yards of front, at a place where the ground gave cover close up to our line. The Bulgars had about four battalions to our two, but the Connaughts had already lost so heavily that having come up into the line 960 strong, they could only muster 350 after this day's fighting.



## 50 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

The 10th Hampshires retired to the prepared second position a mile behind, losing about 200 killed and wounded. The Connaughts, who had been badly cut up by the heavy artillery fire, fell back too. The commander of the 31st Brigade, having the impression that his right flank was being surrounded, retired also about the same time. This new position to which the 30th Brigade withdrew lay between Cadjali and Tatarli on Crête Simonef with an advanced position on Crête Rivet. The Bulgars pushed on after us, but were held back from continuing the pursuit by the fire of our field artillery which prevented them from crossing the Kostorino ridge. Their advance to that point was witnessed at close range by a young subaltern of the 7th Munsters who had been on the left flank of the Connaughts, and was left behind with his platoon in a wood. He was never found by the enemy and got safely away with his men at night. The Bulgars came on, he said, with their rifles slung on their backs, shouting and singing. He saw many Germans among them. They entered Kajali, 30th Brigade's old headquarters, and a British Army doctor who had arrived in the middle of all these events and wanted to report at Brigade Headquarters, straying innocently into the village that night, stumbled to his astonishment upon Bulgars rejoicing round their bivouac fires. He was fired at, but got away in the fog.

December 8th was a day of heavy artillery and machine-gun fire upon our new position. During the night we had been reinforced by three French companies and a mountain battery. The fog grew constantly denser, and in this broken country of steep, twisting ravines and pathless hillsides it was difficult to know whether the enemy might not be pushing on upon the flanks to surround us.

At 5 p.m. on December 8th the 30th Brigade

## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION 51

were ordered to withdraw to a new line across the Dedeli pass, while the 31st was to take up a position in alignment with them along the Karabail ridge, behind which runs the road back to Doiran, and where two battalions of the 29th Brigade were already established. The 30th Brigade started retiring at 5.30 p.m., and as the last battalion left the position the Bulgars rushed up the hill with cheers, firing flares as they came. The gallant rearguard of two companies which had held on to Crête Rivet, the advanced position 800 yards in front, throughout the whole day, under very heavy shelling, gave them a final burst of rapid fire as they came. It was thanks to these two companies that the main position of Crête Simonet was only attacked as we left it. The costly retirement from the original line, where the advanced position on Rocky Peak was lost, contrasts in this respect with the safety with which Crête Simonet was evacuated. In these two companies which held off the Bulgars, however, all the officers were killed or wounded, and one came away only 29, the other 59 strong. Meanwhile the French on our left, being now exposed to the danger of outflanking, retired southwards on December 8th to Cestovo, their line facing north-west, and later to Kizil-Doganli.

On December 9th the 31st Brigade on Karabail was replaced by a brigade of another division which began to arrive, the 31st going into reserve. The general commanding this division came up at the same time and took charge of the operations. The dense fog made it difficult for the new brigade to orient itself, and for the 30th to get in touch with them, so that a proper liaison was not made before the 10th. On that day the French were heavily attacked on their new line at Cestovo, while their left again was being rapidly driven back down the

## 52 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Vardar on Guevgheli. By the afternoon of the next day the Bulgars were pressing so hard upon the French that they had fallen back to a front stretching from Furka through Bogdanci to Guevgheli, and it was the 10th Division's turn for its flank to be left in the air. The Bulgars furthermore were now also trying to get round our right flank, and so down to Lake Doiran to cut our only road of retreat, where it reaches the north-west end of the lake. Fortunately the pathlessness of the mountains prevented that attempt from succeeding.

But Dedeli had to be evacuated hastily on the night of the 11th or it would be too late. Accordingly a general order was given for the 10th Division to retire across the Greek frontier. It was not, of course, sure whether the Bulgar pursuit would stop at this political obstacle, and there was further a strong report that the Greeks were coming in against us, and that the communications of the division with Salonica were anything but safe. The 31st Brigade, already concentrated, marched back first, then the 30th Brigade was withdrawn south of Doiran and bivouacked near the lake.

A good deal of confusion inevitably attended these rapid movements of retreat. Thus at 1 a.m. on the morning of the 12th, when the 30th Brigade received orders at Dedeli to retire on Doiran, one battalion had all its company cooks (about fifteen men) sleeping together in a house. Dedeli, like all Macedonian villages, is a straggling place, and when the order was being circulated the cooks' house was overlooked. So, huddled round their comfortable fire, they slept on undisturbed till daylight, when, on going to the door, they were horrified to find the street full of Bulgars. The cooks seized their rifles, and the Bulgars at this sign of what looked like hostile action took cover and opened a charac-

## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION 58

teristically ill-aimed fire, of which the cooks took advantage to make a bolt for it as hard as they could go down the road to Doiran under cover of the fog, and all rejoined their battalion safely.

The Bulgars advancing down the Strumnitza road stopped just short of the Greek frontier stone on the outskirts of Doiran town, the 30th Brigade Headquarters only leaving Doiran about ten minutes before their arrival.

The 30th Brigade now came down to Salonica by train, and a remark that indicates the conditions prevalent at the time was made by the Greek station-master at Doiran as the first trainload of British soldiers went out. "I am pro-Ally," he said, "but the man at Kilindir is pro-German, and probably won't allow your train to pass."

The other brigades came down by road, and the worn-out 10th Division then went into camp at Kapudjilar, just outside Salonica, until it was moved up to hold the line along the lakes and across to Stavros, which was made part of the entrenched camp.

So ended the British share in the retreat from Serbia.

Our first encounter with the Bulgars as enemies had not been one to fill us with unmingled satisfaction, but at the same time there were many sound reasons for considering that the 10th Division had made the best of very unfavourable conditions. To begin with, it had been very heavily outnumbered. The usual estimate, at the time, of the strength which the Bulgars brought to bear upon us was four divisions, which would have meant about 100,000 men. This is no doubt exaggerated, but where the main attack was made upon the 30th Brigade they were probably 4 to 1, and elsewhere they were 2 to 1. They had the advantage of possessing much mountain artil-

## 54 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

lery, which in this rough and broken country was far more effective than our field guns.

[The explanation of the arrival of these increased Bulgarian numbers upon a front which had been supposed to be held by almost a skeleton force is that after the enemy's capture of Monastir the troops that had been held in reserve for that operation, and were now no longer needed, were brought down from Uskub along the Strumnitza road on to our front.

[Except for the guns which had to be abandoned at Memisli, little material was left behind in the retreat of the 10th Division; a certain amount of ammunition was lost, especially at Crête-Simonet, and perhaps one day's rations in all were abandoned. All the transport was got away. The fog played a very important part in these operations. It stopped all aerial scouting, and greatly interfered with artillery observation. It kept on constantly gathering and lifting alternately in a way that made this confusing country, where every feature is the twin image of a hundred others, unusually baffling for an outnumbered force unaccustomed to the ground. The fog favoured us in so far as but for it the enemy might have pushed on faster and shelled us heavily from commanding positions as we fell back. On the other hand, it helped him in his infantry attacks, for several times our men held their fire when Bulgars loomed up through the mist, hesitating to shoot lest they might be detachments of our own troops.

And now the principal objective which the Allied public, at any rate, and even the majority of the fighting soldiers concerned, had ascribed to our expedition to the Balkans—that of the rescue of Serbia from her invaders—had come unmistakably to naught. Monastir, the last town in New Serbia,

## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION \*55

and one of the coveted prizes to gain which Bulgaria joined in the war, had fallen into the hands of the enemy. The whole of the national territory was overrun, and the Serbian Army was no more than a disorganised multitude of starving men streaming across the savage mountains of Albania towards the Adriatic, and falling by thousands in the snow to die on the way. With the disappearance of what was popularly regarded as the primary object of the expedition, had vanished, too, the hopes, unpractical though they had always been, of a rapid advance on Sofia, or at any rate to some point on the trans-Balkan railway where a barrier could be erected to cut off the through communication by train between Germany and Turkey, which was now complete, and which would aggravate considerably our already unsatisfactory position at the Dardanelles. The point we have now reached, therefore, marks an important stage in the story of the Salonica campaign. It is the beginning of a long spell of military inactivity, but of great labour of preparation for renewed action against our enemies—German, Austrian, Bulgar and Turk—who were unfortunately able during the same period to establish themselves in most formidable defensive positions to guard what they had won.

The Bulgar pursuit of the retreating Allies was not carried across the Greek frontier. It stopped on a line from Guevgheli to Doiran. It was half expected at the time that the enemy might keep on with his advance and try to drive the Allies into the sea. But there were several good reasons against it. For one thing, our Army was falling back on to reinforcements which had arrived and had had time during the recent operations to receive their full equipment of guns and material. Another explanation depends upon the theory that the Bulgars may

## 56 • THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

have had a secret convention with the Greeks about entering their territory at that time.

But physical conditions alone were enough to hold up the Bulgars at the southern frontier of Serbia. They were as exhausted as the French; they, too, had suffered from the bitter weather conditions, and they had had heavy losses in their successive attacks upon the series of entrenched positions which had protected the French retreat. Moreover, the lack of available routes of march was an obstacle even more formidable for the Bulgars than it had been for the French, for the latter had naturally blown up the tunnels and bridges as they came down the railway, so that the enemy could only use the tracks from village to village, which were in an appalling condition and quite incapable of carrying the supply columns and artillery of an army. To press forward yet another fifty miles with exhausted infantry and only mountain artillery upon an adversary close up against his sea base, with the heavy guns of warships behind to support him, would have been a rash undertaking. The Bulgars had won the parts of Macedonia they coveted, and they could afford for the present to pause.

And now the question naturally arose: what is to become of the Allied Expeditionary Force? For the present there was no more Serbia and no more Serbian Army except a disorganised mass of men struggling across Albania into exile. It became necessary to consider the Near Eastern situation as a whole. The Salonica Expedition had an essential relation with the campaigns at Gallipoli (which was now on the eve of being evacuated) and in Egypt. General Monro and Lord Kitchener had already successively visited both the Dardanelles and Salonica to examine the situation on the spot and to consider the bearings of the new Balkan enterprise on the

## THE BULGAR ATTACK ON X DIVISION 57

projected evacuation of the former zone of operations. One scheme that had been mooted at that time was the withdrawal of our forces from the Balkans to make yet another landing at the Dardanelles in a final attempt to get through. As a result of Lord Kitchener's visit, however, it had been decided that it was the Dardanelles that should be abandoned.

It was still necessary to take into consideration Egypt, under whose command the British contingent at Salonica, as part of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, was. Egypt at that time was exposed to the possibility of attack from both sides, and it might be debated whether at any rate the British troops in the Balkans could not be more profitably used there. But strong arguments could be advanced against that scheme. For one thing, if Salonica were to continue to be held in such a way that the port should be secure from long-range bombardment, in case of an enemy advance, the line of the defences would have to be so long that it could not be maintained unless the full number of Allied troops then in the Balkans remained there. Evacuation might, too, have entailed the destruction of a large quantity of stores, to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy, as happened at the Dardanelles. These, and doubtless many other considerations, had all to be taken into account by the Allied Governments. And the issue of their deliberations was that the joint expedition to the Balkans should remain. General Sarrail accordingly proceeded to create for himself a firmly established and protected base for future operations by the construction of the "entrenched camp of Salonica."





## CHAPTER IV.

### •THE " BIRD-CAGE." •

THE entrenched camp of Salonica is the most conspicuous of the many great engineering works which the Allied Armies have carried out in Macedonia. It has made what was, on the landward side, an open town into one of the principal fortresses of the world, and so thoroughly has the work been done that such will Salonica permanently remain on condition that the trenches are kept from decaying under the weather and that the government responsible for Salonica disposes of enough men and guns to garrison the long line.

For the first four months of 1916 the building of the entrenched camp engrossed the energies of the Anglo-French army at Salonica, assisted by a good deal of native labour. The ground behind the town lent itself to the construction of a strong defensive position. Eight miles to the north of the city there is a high ridge running east and west which forms a natural rampart dominating the broad plain beyond. The work of fortifying this ridge and extending the position on each flank to the sea was carried on under completely peaceful conditions, the enemy remaining inactive thirty miles away, where he had halted after our retreat from Serbia, and where he, too, began to dig himself in.

The trenches of the Salonica defences were sited and re-sited with the most painstaking care. General

## 60 . THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Sarrail laid great stress upon a thorough and elaborate system of wiring. Roads and light Decauville railways were laid to carry men and ammunition rapidly to different parts of the front. Great was the labour expended. Some of the works that I have visited there are remarkable examples of strength and convenience, combined with complete concealment.

The whole of the perimeter is not, of course, covered by a continuous trench-line. There are sectors which Nature has already made sufficiently impassable, such as the marshes along the lower banks of the Vardar, south of the bridge on the Monastir road. About 25 miles of the eastern end of the defences, too, which is the British sector, are covered by the broad lakes of Langaza and Beshik.

Though it is by no means likely that these elaborate defences will ever be attacked, provided that the existing conditions in the Balkans continue, with the Allies holding a series of strong lines much further up-country and having the initiative of the fighting in their hands, it is impossible, of course, to describe in any detail the defences of Salonica, despite the fact that the enemy, with his all-pervading Balkan spy-system, probably knows as much about them as anybody. But there are a few interesting facts about them that are common knowledge, and indeed within the reach of anyone who has a good map, such as the Austrian one, which we use.

During the first four months of 1916, however, a German push southward seemed quite possible. Enemy agencies announced with a reiteration that became more and more unconvincing that the Allies at Salonica would be overwhelmed and that Germany would extend her sphere of influence to the limits of the Balkan Peninsula. "You will be driven into the sea," prophesied, with sinister satisfaction, General Dousmanis, chief of the General Staff at

Athens, "and you will not have time even to cry for mercy."

In presence of the possibility that Salonica might have to resist a siege, the defences of the town were devised on three main principles :

1. To keep the town and harbour as safe as possible from long-range enemy bombardment.

2. To make the defended front of such extent that the enemy would need to dispose of large forces to attack it.

3. To have both wings of the line of defence strongly supported, so as to ensure that the enemy should not be able to take the town by an encircling attack from the mouth of the Vardar on one side and Karaburnu on the other—imitating Napoleon's successful tactics at the siege of Toulon (where he captured the town by first taking the fort of Malbosquet that commanded the harbour, and by posting French guns there which cut the garrison off from the support of the Fleet).

A front that is of so varied a nature as that of the entrenched camp is clearly not all of the same importance from the defender's point of view. A glance at the map will show one, for instance, that the only way for an enemy attack to reach the most easterly sector, at Stavros, is by following the road from the mouth of the Struma along the shore of the Gulf of Orfano ; that is the one route along which heavy artillery and wheeled transport could pass. And this road would be absolutely covered by the big guns of the British monitors in the Gulf of Orfano, so that the enemy, if he came that way, would have to run the gauntlet of 12-inch shrapnel.

The whole of this sector, however, was at first under the disadvantage of having very bad communications with Salonica. Stavros was supplied by sea round the Chalcidice peninsula, but a lot of work

## 62 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

in the way of building piers had to be done there before this was satisfactory, and in case a Bulgarian attack had taken place German submarines would no doubt have done their best to interrupt this sea-transport. Since the defences of Salonica were completed, however, some excellent roads have been made connecting the town with this eastern sector, and now lie there as monuments of British energy in valleys that are once more deserted. Macedonia, in fact, is the only one of the world's theatres of war where military operations have done more good than harm. We have tamed the wilderness and civilised the waste, reclaimed the barren and opened up the inaccessible. Along steep gorges where two years ago a laden donkey could hardly find a path there now winds the white ribbon of a first-class road with carefully calculated gradients, stone bridges and culverts, sign-posts, parapets and drainage-gutters, and big English motor-cars travel at speed where even the plodding peasant used to make his way with difficulty.

But in the early days, before these means of communication existed, and when an attack was possible at any moment, the principle that had to be kept in view for this right-hand sector of the line was that too many troops should not be immobilised there as a permanent garrison, for they might be needed to reinforce some other part of the long perimeter. So the system then adopted was to have at the Stavros end of the defences a series of fortified posts, capable of stopping a weak enemy attack and of keeping alert watch and ward. Behind these outposts was a stronger line upon which reserves from Salonica could be concentrated to offer stouter resistance in case the enemy attack should develop into a serious one.

The next sector westwards of the Salonica lines was

a very important one because into it runs the Seres road, which comes down from the Struma valley and was the most convenient route for the enemy to use for his siege artillery and transport. The road entered the entrenched camp at the village of Aivatli, only eight miles from Salonica, a point that was strongly fortified by a Scottish brigade. Fortunately, as regards a hostile attack—though later on the disadvantage of it was felt keenly by ourselves—the Seres road has no railway running alongside it, and for the last ten miles of its approach to our lines it crosses a perfectly flat plain which our positions on the hills completely dominate. One used to ride about on those heights and imagine the wonderful spectacle that would be seen from there if the enemy ever did come down to the attack. The broad flat plain stretched away from below your feet till it faded into the winter mists, out of which rose the first of the four parallel hill-ranges that cross the road to Seres and make the journey to or from the Struma a weary switchback of steep ridges and deep valleys. It was like looking from the battlements of a mediæval castle, and the enemy would have been able to conceal nothing from your view. With field-glasses you could have watched his camps and depots beyond the reach even of our naval guns. In fact, had the Bulgarians advanced on Salonica we should have been in exactly the same position towards them as the Turks at Achi-Baba occupied with regard to us.

With such a field of fire in front of your defences the question was more than usually debatable whether or not advanced positions should be occupied. I will not say what conclusion was come to, nor whether, among other possible advanced posts, it was decided to hold that conspicuous and inconvenient height of "Gibraltar," which towers, a

## 64 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

lonely landmark for miles round, out of the desolate flat plain I have just been describing.

Gibraltar lay too far out for it to be included in our main line. Its shape is indicated by its nickname; it is an isolated, barren, treeless hill, that falls almost sheer on one side.

The remaining sector of the Salonica lines, lying between the Galliko and Vardar rivers, is on a rolling plain. The French put a vast amount of work into fortifying this sector. There are cemented machine-gun emplacements, dugouts of unusual depth and solidity, broad bands of wire twisting everywhere across the grass, and forming compartments each swept by cross-fire from the flanks, so that a breakthrough at any point would only mean penetration into more formidable defences beyond. Behind the line, too, are many ravines, which provide natural shelter for ammunition dumps, and further back there are, of course, whole systems of reserve trenches.

The circumstance which made all these works so strong was that they were constructed, not only with all the experience of modern warfare that their designers had gained in France, but also under conditions of absolute peace. The scientific ideas underlying the plan of the defences were accordingly able to be developed to a high degree of perfection, the second line not being the haphazard product of the varying fortunes of battle, but made to correspond fully to the tactical needs of the first. In fact, the defences of Salonica may be regarded as some of the most formidable in the world.

## CHAPTER V.

### GETTING READY, AND INCIDENTS OF THE SPRING OF 1916.

AT the same time as this vast scheme of defence was being carried out, the network of roads with which we have changed the face of Macedonia was being steadily woven. You best realise the immense extent of the system of highways with which the Allies have endowed the deserted hinterland of Salonica when you fly above it in an aeroplane. Main roads, meshed like a spider's web below you, run for miles in directions where before we came there was not even a goat-track. Often they take the form of a broad ledge blasted out of the sheer rock. There are bridges that will support a three-ton motor-lorry over every torrent; there are stone culverts to carry off the spates of spring. You will notice artesian wells that pump water by the thousand gallons an hour; supply-dumps with their mountains of yellow packing cases are scattered broadcast. As for buildings in corrugated iron of every sort, from bath-houses to general hospitals, there is a townful of them. And this scene, though densest and largest around Salonica, is reproduced on smaller scales at several points up-country as far as Corps Headquarters near the front. Every feature in it had to be constructed from the beginning. When we first got to Salonica no lighter could even reach the shore except at the Quay. By the present time there are twelve piers



## 66 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

at which unloading is almost constantly going on. Where the Main Supply Base now stands—a dry, clean expanse of gravel—was then a sort of Greek remount lines, just a foetid mass of mud and manure, and the first motor-lorry that ventured along what have since become in the wettest weather firm, hard roads had to be pulled out by another with ropes, bogged to the axles.

Work—any amount of it—and all of it work that was absolutely preliminary to the idea of undertaking operations. You cannot begin operations in the field when your Main Supply Base is sinking into a swamp, nor when there is not a road in the country capable of bearing up under the Army's motor-lorry traffic for two wet days together. We had first to build up the necessary elements of modern civilisation in Macedonia before we could begin to "get on with the war."

But the Salonica Army did not by any means lose sight of the enemy while these necessary defensive works were being carried out. We had by now come to an arrangement with the Greeks about moving our troops as military needs required into the region between Salonica and the Greek frontier, and mounted troops with headquarters at Kilkish were keeping daily watch upon the Bulgars and the Germans by Lake Doiran, and eastwards along the line of the Krusha-Balkan. I spent some time with them, going out with their patrols which played a game of hide-and-seek—the "seek" chiefly on our side—with the German Uhlan cavalry, who were reciprocally full of inquisitiveness about us. A lovely country for the Balkans was this debatable land into which we rode, a region of wooded, irregular hills, from whose heights could be seen mile upon mile of the Struma plain, with its shining river on the one side and the hilly country beyond Lake Doiran

on the other. At such look-outs as the Gola ridge, to which patrols both of the Germans and ourselves went every day, always trying to ambush each other, you could sit among the bushes and through your glasses watch life in the enemy's lines as comfortably as from a grand-stand. Here, down the same Strumnitza road as the 10th Division went up into Serbia in November, 1915, comes a German motor-car, making for Doiran town, which lies below you by the side of its black, Norwegian-looking lake. There are convoys of pack animals, too, heading for that supply-dump where piled tin cases lie flashing in the sun like heliographs. It was just the sort of view as you may have from the North Downs of an English main road on a summer's day. Occasionally the French would send up a couple of 8-inch guns, mounted on an armoured train to steam along the Karasuli-Kilindir loop-line and disturb these peaceful enemy activities, and one feature of the scene in consequence was always a German observation-balloon, looking like a ghostly grub in the sky, as it hung there on the look-out for the flashes of this elusive artillery, which always opened fire from a different place.

Meanwhile, the infantry back in the Salonica area was smartening up its soldierly qualities again after three months of digging by carrying out brigade route-marches with tactical exercises on the way. The change was a welcome one from the confinement of the narrow gullies into which the men had been tucked away for the last four months while they carved endless trenches in Salonica's stony rampart of hills, and they marched out of the gaps in the wire as gaily as boys on a holiday. For while no soldiers dig better than the British, none hate it more.

The day's programme of twenty miles of foot-slogging under a hot sun in a permanent fog of white dust, each man with a heavy pack on his back and a separate

## 68. THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

halo of flies round his head, could hardly be called relaxation, but the relief from the drudgery of swinging pick and shovel was enough to make the labour a delight. I used to find great pleasure myself in accompanying these route marches (I admit that it might have been otherwise if I had not had a horse to do them on), but this gratification was derived chiefly from watching the men. The war was only twenty months old, but how much in the way of bigger muscles and broader chests it had put on to the frames of these soldiers, I do not know. I am certain, though, that the result of their training at home and in France, followed by six months of good food, fresh air and daily digging out here, was that a heftier, healthier set of men you could have found nowhere, and that the towns from which they came would not have recognised them for the slim-built clerks and shop-assistants and the pale-faced artisans that they once were, and would still have been if the war had not called them. There were battalions like one of the Wiltshires which would march a thousand strong all day and not a single man fall out.

It is a picturesque scene, too, as the Brigade marches on to the ground where it is to bivouac for the night. In half-an-hour you will see an empty dell or a deserted hillside changed into a busy military town, with its appointed districts each set out in regular streets of little shelter-tents, its fixed drinking and washing places, its cook-house fires burning, its own hospital established in a big marquee, its headquarters mess-table set up and laid and its own telephone and telegraph office sending and receiving messages incessantly. The staff-captain who rode ahead to choose its site works his miracle even quicker than the genie of the Arabian Nights, who needed from sunset to sunrise to raise his magic city in the desert.

And if you spend a night like this with a British Brigade on the march you realise how it is that our Army keeps in war that look of freshness and smartness that characterises it in peace. The British soldier as regards his personal habits is probably the cleanest in the world. No matter how footsore the men may be, no matter how exhausted by their long, heavy-laden tramp in the sweltering heat, the first thing they do after getting their equipment off and their bivouac set up is to take their towel from their haversack and make for the nearest stream. The sentries posted to fix the limits of the washing-places have all they can do to regulate the rush. In a few minutes there are, first dozens, then hundreds of men, standing most of them stark naked by the waterside, washing themselves from head to foot. I have seen a good many civilians at home who ought to be taken to see British soldiers wash. It is a lesson in thoroughness. Face and neck and scalp disappear under a thick layer of lather and are scrubbed and rubbed and scoured with almost vindictive energy, as if they were so much harness being polished. Then, after a tremendous slooshing with water, the head vanishes again into the folds of a towel so rough that it might be made up into hair-shirts for anchorites, and finally, with much blowing and panting, the man emerges, clean, fresh, content, with a face as red as a poppy and as glistening as the morning.

Uncasy at the preparations the Allies were making in the Balkans, though affecting to mock at Salonica as his "biggest internment camp," the enemy tried to perturb us and perhaps raise trouble through arousing the fears of the civilian population by carrying out night air-raids on our base at Salonica. Aeroplanes came once at dawn in March and turned to and fro over the centre of the town dropping bombs. But they lost three if not four machines on their way back. A

## 70 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

zeppelin also made a successful raid on February 1st and set a warehouse belonging to the Bank of Salonica on fire, besides killing several civilians.

But the second visit of the same zeppelin to Salonica, after several unsuccessful attempts to return there, led to its destruction. In the small hours of May 6th the town was awakened by the crash of anti-aircraft guns from the hills behind and from the ships in the harbour, and there, floating yellow in the glare of the searchlights over the heart of Salonica, was a zeppelin, the first the townspeople had set eyes upon. A characteristically silly panic started, the people rushing out of their houses, and scurrying in contrary directions along the streets. The zeppelin made for the harbour as if to bomb the warships there. At first it was too vertically above them for the naval gunners to fire, but a moment later the airship altered course, and a 12-pounder mounted on a high carriage on the forward bridge of H.M.S. *Agamemnon* brought it down in a long slant on to the marshes at the mouth of the Vardar, where, a moment after it had touched, the zeppelin burst into flames. A startling long-drawn-out cheer rang from the silent English and French warships at the sight and echoed through the darkness across the frightened town.

It was the zeppelin's own crew who had set fire to it when it stranded, and they tried afterwards to escape through the swamps around; they were rounded up, though, next morning by French cavalry as they were drying their drenched clothes in the sun. The prisoners' account of themselves was that the zeppelin had come from Temesvar in Hungary; it had previously carried out raids on Riga, Dvinsk and Minsk in Russia. It was 200 yards long and had four six-cylinder engines. It had been launched in the second half of 1915. I myself found a pencilled

inscription on the aluminium framework of the nose reading, "Potsdam, August 11th, 1915," which must have been a date when it was under construction. The crew said that they were astonished at the way they had been picked up by our anti-aircraft batteries and followed all down the line to Salonica. By the time they got there they were so blinded by the glare of the searchlights converging on them that they could not see to drop their bombs.

Directly the zeppelin came down a British torpedo-boat patrolling on the boom landed a party to arrest the crew, if they could be found, and bring away anything of importance from the wreck. After an accidental encounter among the dense reeds between one detachment and another in which each thought it had found the enemy, and the first imperiously called "Hands up!" to which the second immediately rejoined, "Hands up yourselves, you blighters; we've been looking for you all morning," they reached the wreck and there found a German naval war flag hanging from the stern, undamaged by the fire. This ensign of the zeppelin which H.M.S. *Agamemnon* finally brought down—whether it had been previously hit or not—now finds a place in the War Museum at the Invalides in Paris. But the *Agamemnon's* have, as a consolation, one of the propellers of the zeppelin hanging on the wall of the Captain's quarters in memory of their exploit.

I went out to the wreck early next day. It was a strenuous journey. The shoalwater of the Vardar mouth is too shallow for even a rowing boat to approach the shore, and when you have waded to the bank you find that you must still go knee-deep in water for a mile or so with the reeds meeting above your head. A Canadian medical officer was even drowned trying to reach the wreck on horseback.

## 72 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

One would never have believed it possible that a single zeppelin would carve up into so many souvenirs as that one did. Amid the harassed protests of its French guard, English officers, sailors, even nurses who had made the muddy and exhausting journey would hack and twist at the broken framework for days afterwards, yet when later on it was officially cut up and removed several bargeloads of fragments still remained.

Rumours, that are always more popular when they are grisly, alleged that two men of the crew had been pinned underneath the wreck and burned alive. A midshipman, in fact, burrowing in the mud, even found what he proclaimed in triumph to be a "charred human hand." It certainly had that shape. Though blackened by fire and covered with ooze, the form of the clutching fingers could be clearly seen. Their crooked grasp seemed to have been straining in a last agony for something solid to seize upon amid the spongy slime. The grim trophy was bottled in spirits of wine and much admired, until one day its owner consented, at the entreaty of a friend, to cede him one finger of the blackened relic. The ship's surgeon was asked to perform the operation of severing the finger, but, to the surprise of everyone, his knife sliced right through it at one cut. It then transpired that the clutching hand of the burnt Boche was nothing more gruesome than an empty glove singed by the flames and tight-filled with caked mud.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OURSELVES AND THE GREEKS : RELATIONS AT SALONICA.

THE story of our relations with the Greeks is a great part of the whole history of the Balkan campaign. Our extraordinary situation made that inevitable. There we were, fighting on neutral territory to which we had come by invitation from the national Government—that must never be forgotten—but where, owing to a subsequent unconstitutional change of that Government, we found ourselves thoroughly unwelcome guests and had to consider our hosts as also our secret enemies.

It was never fully realised at home how much the Greeks did hamper us during the first part of the Balkan campaign, not so much by what they did as by what they might do. They interfered with us actively in petty details—until General Sarraïl proclaimed martial law and took over the administration of the Army area—and they were always a threat and an obsession in the larger matters of politics and strategy. The criticism at home was : “ Why don’t you get on with your war against the Bulgars and stop bothering about these insignificant Greeks ? ” The answer to that is that when you have got any job of work to do and all the time have behind you a man who is, or whom you believe to be, about to stab you in the back as soon as you get well into



## 74 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

it, you cannot help your attention being distracted from your principal occupation.

The trouble was that the Allied Army in the Orient could do nothing to clear up the situation and get a firm, sure base to work on until their Governments at home gave their consent. And the Allied Governments, being made up of men who have never been to the Balkans and are consequently quite unacquainted with the special mentality of the Balkan peoples, have always fallen into the natural mistake of considering Greece and other Balkan states as being replicas on a smaller scale of the big Western European nations, swayed by the same considerations, governed by the same motives, looking at things from the same angle. Of course, that is not so, but hence very many of our mistakes in that part of the world.

You really need to have been to Salonica to realise what a nuisance and a danger the Greeks were to us until M. Venizelos improved things by his revolution. I could give a long list of instances, but that would not convey a full impression. It was a sneaking, underhand hostility that King Constantine's officers and officials practised. Outwardly they were correct and coldly courteous, but many of the chief of them were working deliberately for the Germans against us all the time, and you felt the atmosphere of enmity in your bones.

A simple parable will perhaps convey as well as anything an idea of the situation we found on arriving at Salonica. Imagine that you were a Parliamentary candidate going down to fight an election in a town where there is only one possible hotel. The manager of this hotel, who is a friend of yours, and a thorough adherent of your party, offers you a set of rooms at the hotel and you take the offer. The manager promises, too, to help in every way he can with your

campaign. Just as you are arriving, and when all your arrangements have been made, you learn that the managing director of the hotel, who is a bitter opponent of your political party and devoted to the other side, is furious that his manager has let you the rooms and has dismissed him in consequence. It is too late for him to prevent you taking the accommodation that you were offered, but the managing director gives strict orders to his staff to make you just as uncomfortable as they can. They will not answer the bell ; they cut off the light and water ; they will not serve you with food in the hotel, on the plea that there would otherwise not be enough for the other guests ; they open and read your letters ; they spy upon you in every way ; they communicate your plans to your political opponent so that he can anticipate them ; and, the election becoming a rowdy one, you receive information that the managing director has the intention, on the first occasion that you try to address the crowd from the balcony, to have you sandbagged from behind. Now, under those circumstances, who could give full and undivided attention to fighting the election and refuting the political arguments of his opponent ; who would not be at the same time very much preoccupied in taking precautions against the troublesome managing director of the hotel ?

We have had two kinds of relations with the Greeks—local commercial relations, which have been, needless to say, exceedingly profitable to them (and in the term Greeks I include the large Hebrew population of Salonica which is of Greek nationality), and the larger political relations of which the chief landmarks have been the proclamation of martial law at Salonica in June, 1916, the “Salonica Revolution” of August, the coming of M. Venizelos to Salonica in October, and finally the occupation of Thessaly

## 78 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

profiteering confined to individuals. Public bodies took advantage of the boom. For a Greek orphanage, needed as the nucleus of a General Hospital (it would only hold 500 beds), we had to pay rent at the rate of £9,000 a year, and then spend between £5,000 and £10,000 on filling up the existing cesspools and draining it to the sea.

Such establishments as Floca's Café and the White Tower restaurant and cabaret have, of course, made fortunes for their very wide-awake proprietors. My memory of Floca's from visits to Salonica before the war is of a large plateglass-sided room, furnished with many chairs and tables, but normally containing not more than a score of Greeks or Jews, who had met there to discuss business deals while twiddling their inevitable strings of beads. None of them, though they might remain two hours, would buy more than a cup of Turkish coffee (pre-war price 1d.), or a 'mastic' ( $\frac{1}{2}$ d. more), and even with that they would demand a series of plates of *mézé*—a sort of *hors-d'œuvre*, consisting of scraps of salt fish, olives and slices of sausage (thrown in free before the war). The more frugal-minded would content themselves with a glass of water (served free). Tips were unknown to the humble waiters of Floca's in those far-off days. Only on Saturday and Sunday—the Jew and Christian Sabbaths—would there be an affluence of expensively dressed Levantine ladies from the Quartier des Campagnes, which is the residential suburb of Salonica, and they would bring custom amounting perhaps to a fourpenny lemonade or a fivepenny ice, but as they would sit over it from tea-time till dinner, and a party of five secure its right to a table on the terrace by giving only two orders, it is clear that the amount of the receipts necessary to make Floca's a paying concern under normal conditions was small.

But since the Allies came Floca's is full from early morning, when officers arriving from the front by overnight trains breakfast there (two boiled eggs, 1s. 2d.; coffee, 8d.; bread, 4d.), to late at night, when the last liqueur-glass with a generous margin of air at the top is emptied and paid for at 80 centimes. Several times the French military authorities have fallen upon Floca's and it has been *consigné* (or as we say, put out of bounds) for charging too much or reducing too considerably the size of the portions it serves. Then for the duration of the order the café that is normally thronged with officers of six nationalities on town leave, for breakfast, the morning refresher, the glass of vermouth before luncheon, the liqueur after luncheon, tea (sometimes with the company of nurses to swell Floca frères' receipts), the *apéritif* before dinner, the liqueur after dinner, and the final beer or whisky-and-soda before turning in, is reduced to a meagre clientele of civilians. But as soon as the prohibition is lifted the place immediately swarms once more with customers impatient at the indifferent service and indignant at the exaggerated bill, but obliged to go there because it is the only rendezvous. In passing, one may say that the fact that Floca's is always full by no means indicates that the Army at Salonica is slack. Floca's has a constantly changing set of patrons, made up of officers down from the front on three days' leave (remember that there is far less leave home from Salonica than from France); and of officers arriving with drafts and quartered for a few days in rest-camps round the town.

How much better it would have been if we had taken over Salonica on a businesslike basis at the beginning of the Balkan campaign and regulated prices on a just scale which would have prevented this flow of money from British into alien pockets.

## 80 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

The Greeks are a commercial people. It would have appealed very strongly to their instincts as money-makers if we had said to the Greek Government as soon as the expedition was decided upon, "We need Salonica as a base; we must have full control of its administration while the sovereignty remains yours, the revenues are collected by you and the Greek flag continues to fly. For this undisturbed control we will pay you a rent of so many millions a year." We could then have gone to Salonica as to an Allied town. Instead of having to pay iniquitous sums without protest for fear of offending neutral feeling, we could have requisitioned whatever we needed at equitable rates, and we could have fixed prices on a pre-war basis with due allowance for increase in cost of raw materials. This, in view of the vast augmentation of business that we brought, would still have left a large profit to the traders, while we should have been protected against the corner-maker and the profiteer who have both done so well out of all the Allies.

And just as the foregoing was being written, there comes news of what really sounds like a judgment upon the greed of Salonica. Two-thirds of the town within the walls has been wiped out in two days by an extraordinary conflagration. The business section and what one may call the native quarter have entirely disappeared. Floca's, the Odeon, the Splendid Palace, the Rue Venizelos—all of them names that had gradually become as familiar to scores of Englishmen in the Balkans as *Ciro's*, the *Empire*, the *Savoy* and the *Strand* are, on a far different plane, to Londoners—exist to-day as nothing but charred and smoking ruins. The Salonica Club, which was saved for a time by being kept practically underwater by the converging hydrants of the Fleet from the opposite side of the

Quay, was the last building to succumb. It will be missed more than any, for it has the only comfortable chairs in Salonica and the readiness with which it opened its doors to Allied visitors was very welcome. The loss of the whole of the shopping area will be keenly felt by officers up-country, for whom the town was, however inadequately, the sole source of the conveniences of life. Salonica, formerly the solitary outpost of civilisation in Macedonia, now stands as desolate as any muddy village of the Balkans.

Though practically all our military establishments, being outside the area of the old town, were unharmed by the fire, this disaster must nevertheless hamper us as an army for some time to come. To begin with, we have, at the time of writing, some 60,000 of the burnt-out inhabitants on our hands. We are feeding them, we are lodging them, and the energies of the Greek Government, which would otherwise have been engaged in preparing their country to take its share in our Balkan campaign, will now be occupied for some time in housing and equipping these destitute refugees. The town can only be said to have brought the disaster on itself. Though chiefly built of wooden houses its fire brigade was simply Gilbertian—a wag once suggested in the *Balkan News* that as more water escaped out of the leaks in the hose than through the nozzle it would be more advantageous to lay the pipe sideways on to the fire. And in fact the Salonica firemen always proved themselves incapable of coping with the most trivial house-burnings unless reinforced by fire-parties from our Fleet. So that Salonica, with the huge fortune it has made out of us as a town, seems only rightly punished for the fecklessness of its civic organisation.

As a spectacle the conflagration must have equalled Rome burning. The part of the town

## 82 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

destroyed rises as an amphitheatre within the still complete girdle of its mediæval walls. Most of it is a maze of rambling, crooked little alleys, mysterious and picturesque. The church of St. Demetrius, forcibly converted for four and a half centuries of Turkish occupation into a mosque, but still showing faintly on its walls the stiff-figured frescoes that artists of the Eastern Roman Empire drew, has met this lurid fate at the end of its eventful history. Few towns, indeed, have had so tumultuous a past as Salonica. Sack and massacre, siege and revolution, war and civil strife, have all convulsed it again and again. It has been left until the time when the greatest war of all had brought to Salonica Allied troops from every corner of the earth for the most historical part of the town to find destruction in the flames.

The official relations of the Allies with the Greeks, as distinct from those of commercial intercourse, were characterised from our first landing by covert obstruction on the part of the royalist authorities, officials, and administration of the town. Their first action was to interfere with the free choice by the Allies of encamping sites on the vast area of waste land which surrounds Salonica. Thus they insisted on apportioning to the French the Zeitenlick camp, which was notoriously unhealthy ground.

Furthermore, within the town, when we began to negotiate for houses to lodge the various offices of Army Headquarters, the Greek military authorities would requisition them to prevent our getting the accommodation, and when they heard of the negotiations too late they even prosecuted proprietors for letting their property without official sanction. Part of our headquarters was consequently lodged in most inconvenient buildings, which had to be changed later on when circumstances at last forced General Sarrail

to take matters more into his own hands. When the Allies bought foodstuffs locally, the Greeks would often requisition these before delivery, and once they went so far as to place a sentry on some stores that were being transferred by process of sale from the English to the French Army, basing their action upon some technical point. Finally the Greek Government issued an order that no foodstuffs were to be sold to the Allied Armies at all, an order which the latter made no attempt to go behind. The object of it was evident. King Constantine's Government wished to deprive us of the advantage of finding ready to hand in Greece any of the stores necessary for our campaign.

But the scope of Greek obstruction extended much beyond the limits of the town. The Greek Army, mobilised on a war footing, lay between us and our enemy, and formed a tight cordon round the Allies at Salonica. Strong posts held every road, at a distance from the town that was in some places of only five or six miles. On the Seres road, until at least the end of the year, the Greek Army refused to allow our yeomanry and cyclist patrols to go beyond Kar. Into the zone beyond their rearward outpost line the Greeks forbade even a mounted reconnaissance to enter. This obstruction on the part of the Greeks even prevented our Staff officers for some time from studying the ground on which the fortifications of Salonica would have later to be constructed.

The railways, of course, afforded a most convenient opening for covert interference. When the French General Staff asked the Greek authorities for railway wagons (on hire, be it always understood), they could never get them in anything like the quantity that the available rolling stock could have provided, as was shown by the fact that meanwhile empty wagons



## 84 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

would be left standing in stations up the line. When the French asked for three hundred they would be offered forty-five, and if flat trucks were needed it was almost certainly covered ones that would be sent. The object of this system was to delay the landing and transport of our stores.

Furthermore, in the working of the two lines we used there were endless delays. It must be remembered that the fact that we were in a neutral country prevented our putting them under military management. The Greek personnel, much of it of more than doubtful disposition towards the Entente, remained at its posts to assist (or hinder) our traffic movement. Consequently the line during the operations in Serbia in November and December, 1915, never carried more than six to eight trains a day, a figure which would have been absurd with efficient management. And as for speed—to come from Guevgheli to Salonica (under sixty miles) took from ten to twelve hours. Two derailments occurred under this Greek control of the line, both rather unaccountable, both capable of gravely hindering our retreat from Serbia. Later on, when we were organising our base at Salonica, trucks would be sent as if by chance to the far ends of the line—Florina or Xanthe—so that we could not get hold of them and use them, while they would be there for the Bulgars to seize immediately they crossed the frontier, should they advance. In the same way coal would be transferred from the depot at Salonica on various pretexts to points up the line, such as Florina, where the Greek prefect of the town was later arrested by the French in red-handed conspiracy with the Germans and Bulgars for smuggling supplies across the frontier to them.

Whenever we wanted to make use of Greek telegraph lines, the habitual reply was that they were

needed for Greek Government purposes. When circumstances admitted of our establishing a parallel line of our own we had first to get the permission of the Greeks\*to do so, and, beyond all question, telegraph wires of the French General Staff were tapped by Greek officers. Allied wireless was often jammed, so that the warships in the harbour could not get messages reporting enemy submarines.

There existed, moreover, in the early days at Salonica, a well-organised system of official espionage which had every means\*of ascertaining our strength and movement and communicated the information it collected to quarters that, beyond doubt, passed it on to the enemy. This organisation was under the control of Colonel Messalas, the Greek Base Commandant at Salonica. He used to send in his reports in triplicate every week, one to the Minister of War at Athens, one to the King, and the other direct to Queen Sophie. No one can doubt that these reports were coded and transmitted by wireless to the German General Staff. One of the first acts of this official anti-Ally organisation was to remove from their posts all the French, Italian, and other pro-Ally officials employed on the railways, and replace them by Greeks who could be trusted to obey orders. The guards of goods trains on the Macedonian railways, who travel in a sort of little sentry box fixed on to the end of a truck, and rising above its roof, had to give a written report after every journey of any movement of troops they had seen, or any military works they had noticed in the course of construction.

Meanwhile, with our characteristic punctiliousness of respect for the rights of neutrals, we agreed to furnish the Greek port authorities with a return of all the material we landed at Salonica. This was for purposes of estimation of the dues to be paid on

## 86 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

it. Of course, our Staff protected itself as far as possible by using vague terms—"so many tons of artillery material," "so many tons of forage," and so on—but the Greeks even had the boldness to ask for details, which, needless to say, they did not get, and after some time the system was abolished, being replaced, I believe, by one based on averages.

For the spy Salonica is Paradise. He thrives and multiplies there like a microbe in jelly. If a spy had the chance of creating an ideal environment to work in he could not improve upon Salonica. Imagine a town where the languages commonly and regularly spoken are old Spanish, much adulterated, Greek, Turkish, Italian, Bulgarian, Serb, Roumanian, and French; where everyone has changed his subjection at least once during the last five years—from Turkish to Greek—and where before that several thousands of people had all sorts of claims to European nationalities, based on the complicated Turkish system of the Capitulations (under which one brother in the same family would be "French," another "English," another "Italian," perhaps without one of them being able to speak a single sentence in the tongue of the nationality he claimed); where the old part of the town is a maze of densely inhabited alleys, most of them without names, where the houses, Turkish fashion, present usually nothing but a blind wall to the street, and have a high-walled, stout-doored courtyard in front of them; where there is no directory, and where the people living in a street have no dealings with or knowledge of other people living in the same street who are not of their race, language, and religion; where you are up against the traditional Eastern idea of the seclusion of women, and where many women—Turks and Dounmehs (Mohammedans of Jewish race)—always go veiled; where there is an unknown number of secret under-

ground rooms and passages, as you might expect in a modern town built on the ruins of an ancient and prosperous city ; and where at first the local authorities of the place were not at all ill-disposed towards the spy, but inclined to protect him if possible against our military police ; where many of the town's richest and most influential inhabitants had strong personal reasons for sympathising with the enemy—Jewish money-lenders of Salonica held mortgages on estates in Hungary and Austria, and the town had always swarmed with Austrian agents spreading the idea that its future prosperity depended on its becoming linked with Austria-Hungary as the outlet of the Central Empires to the Mediterranean. Imagine but a fraction of these conditions and you will realise something of how easy it was for enemy agents to work against us, and how hard it was for our counter-spy service to hunt them down.

The spies of Salonica were run by committees. Each of the enemy nationalities had its committee, has still very likely, and these employ agents on that ingenious secret-society principle by which each man knows only two others. They found their tools chiefly among the civil labourers the Army employed.

I went out several times with the military police on their almost nightly work of arresting spies. The rendezvous would be in the small hours. As you reached it something familiar would strike you in the mere attitudes of the little squad of khaki-clad Army policemen waiting in the shadow at the street corner, something more familiar still about their walk. It was the deliberate manner of the London constable, unmistakable even without the dignity of helmet and blue, for many of the P.M.'s men at Salonica have had a beat in the Metropolitan area.

Strung out to make the tramp of feet less noticeable

## 88 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

in the silence, the party would make its way up the hill into the old town—an informer as guide, followed by the P.M. and the police. The dark streets, twisting about on the hill within the city walls, are just what the lanes of Tudor London must have been. Crooked gables lean out across the narrow way and the space between the houses on either side widens and narrows after the haphazard of their building. Rough, slippery cobbles are underfoot; an open drain trickles along the edge of the street. Never can you see for more than twenty yards ahead, and the shadows among the crazy old wooden house fronts, with their heavy doors and iron-barred windows, are picked out only by a feebly flickering little oil-lamp here and there along the walls.

"This is the place," whispers the native agent who guides the party. A low doorway of grey wood, which leads evidently into the small courtyard that separates each of these houses from the street. The heavy hand of a policeman beats a tattoo upon it that soon brings a gabble of frightened Greek or Turkish from within. "Open quick!" calls a secret service officer in reply to a torrent of enquiries, and then, "Well, we can't give him time to get away. Just push the door in, one of you." A heave from the shoulder of a fourteen-stone policeman sends it flying with a crash, and a neat little stone-flagged courtyard, with a sycamore tree rustling in the corner and the bluewashed wall of a house on the other side, lies open before us. Figures with candles in their hands are peering anxiously out of the doorway, and when it is a British uniform that steps into the courtyard a wail goes up that testifies to uneasy consciences. The business of making the arrest is soon over. No resistance is offered. It would so clearly be futile.

"Is Hakki Mehmed here?" Hakki Mehmed admits his identity quite unconcernedly. The Turks certainly show character and self-possession under these trying circumstances. They never raise their voices or get excited. They suggest, as one gentleman to another, that the privacy of their harem shall be respected, and they reassure the weeping black-veiled figures who crane from its doorway with the confident statement that they will certainly be back again to-morrow. Then a military policeman closes in on each side of them and off they go. Perhaps they will come back, as they say; perhaps penal servitude in Cairo will be their lot before they see the little blue-walled courtyard again.

Eerie scenes, some of those that are lit up by the native oil-lamps and the electric torches of the soldiers in these high-walled courtyards in the heart of Old Salonica. Odd galleries and gables jut out above; there is a quaint old wellhead in the middle, and though the women are shrouded in their regulation black, the men wear padded garments of brightly coloured print, halfway between a frock-coat and a dressing-gown. The whole household sleeps almost fully dressed on the low cushion divans that are the only furniture in the whitewashed carpetless rooms. The place looks clean enough at the first glance, but you do well not to cross its threshold, for the walls are swarming with the vermin that live in the crannies of the century-old woodwork. And some strange old figures totter out to blink at the flashing lights—Turkish great-grandfathers of uncertain age and many deformities, who never venture into the streets but spend their days crouched in a corner of the closed-in dwelling, waiting for death to take them.

Sometimes arrests have to be made in Turkish houses of a better class, and there the additional

## 90 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

complication of a part of the house being supposed to be strictly barred off as the harem makes the search more complicated. The servants, with the ingenuity of the Levantine mind, are expert in lying to conceal their master's whereabouts. "Since you *must* know," said the butler of one suspect, "my master is unfortunately addicted to excessive drinking, and often stays down town all night getting drunk with friends. He has not come home to-night, and I expect that that is where he is." And this plausible story, told with the shamefaced air of a faithful servant letting a stranger into the family secrets, might have been believed if one of the search party had not happened just then to notice a small door that had not been opened. It led into a little private garden belonging to the harem, and there, standing in his nightshirt among the bushes in the middle of a flower-bed, was the supposed secret drinker and master of the house, who was so badly wanted by our police.

Although the privacy with which Turks surround their households makes arrests there rather more exciting, there are plenty of suspects of other races to be dealt with. They are discovered in all sorts of places—presenting forged passes to pickets on the roads; at the railway-station; on the quay when steamers come in; or even in the midst of their astonished friends in the café. And if there is one thing that adds to the impression that these arrests make on the local population, it is the quiet and unperturbed way in which they are carried out by our people. No fuss, no threatenings, no drawn revolvers—just an almost casual "Is that the man? Bring him along," the sharp click of a handcuff locking, and another enemy agent is led mildly away to a fate which his conscience tells him is full of unpleasant possibilities.

There are plenty of misdemeanours less grave than

spying, however, that bring the local population of Salonica into contact with our military police. Stealing or receiving goods stolen from our supply dumps and stores is the commonest of them. A regular business sprang up in stealing and secretly disposing of portable property of the British Army directly we landed in Salonica. Blankets, breeches, condensed milk, biscuits—hidden stores of them were accumulated all over the town and traded off at very remunerative prices. Our agents usually got on to their track by employing a Greek to pose as a purchaser and would seize both the goods and the money provided to induce a sale just as they were being exchanged in great privacy between the guilty receiver and the paid informer.

There are thousands of Greeks employed about the quays discharging ships, and in the early days they had all sorts of tricks for pilfering. They would knock a case off a lighter in a pre-arranged spot so that they could come back at night and fish it up again. At one dump, surrounded by a barbed wire fence, they even tunnelled down to beneath the pile of packing-cases and then opened them from below and extracted their contents, leaving the emptied boxes in place so that they looked as if they had never been touched. The Greek soldiers were even bold enough to form bands and hold up isolated motor-lorries laden with stores, so that an order had to be issued that each lorry should carry a guard of two armed men, and A.S.C. drivers always had their rifles by their sides. Gradually, however, the activities of our preventive organisation, and the robust handling which a Greek thief caught red-handed might expect from the military police, made the game too risky to be worth playing, and thieving from the Army has now decreased to insignificance.





## CHAPTER VII.

### OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE "SALONICA REVOLUTION."

THE expulsion of the German, Austrian, Bulgarian and Turkish consuls from our midst at Salonica was the first step that the Allies took which emphasised the inevitable conflict of authority in the town. Up till then the situation had really been Gilbertian. Here we were at war with all these four states, the Salonica Army being actually engaged with three of them, while at the base and headquarters of that Army the official diplomatic representatives of the enemy countries were still going about freely and openly—not organising a spy system against us, for all that had been done long before—but supervising it, meeting every day, exchanging information, sending off reports in code, posting letters by the train which ran daily to Constantinople, sitting down at lunch and dinner in crowded restaurants at the same table with French or British officers, who never imagined for a moment that the unobtrusive civilian in a black coat at their elbow was the Bulgarian consul, perfectly acquainted with their language, and at the head of an organisation which was working night and day with the sole object of their personal destruction and national undoing. The Bulgarian consul, M. Nedkoff, was the most active and intelligent of the four enemy consuls. I had known him

## 94 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

personally in earlier years ; in fact, I remember his drinking the health of King George with sincere enthusiasm on Coronation Day, 1910, when both he and I were the guests of the British consul in Monastir at a dinner given in honour of the event.

Some were in favour from the first of arresting these consuls, but General Sarrail's decision was to respect their extra-territorial rights which they must be considered to possess as consuls on neutral soil, unless and until they could be proved to be carrying on espionage. That was just the difficulty. The Greek police protected them ; it was impossible to catch them in the act. The Allied secret service agents were shadowed by Greek detectives who warned the consuls of danger. Yet there was a moral certainty that the enemy consuls were not only carrying on espionage but also concealing stocks of bombs and arms.

At last, however, the Germans took hostile action against Salonica—not on the camps around but against the town itself. They sent their aeroplanes to bomb it, thereby showing that they at least did not consider it neutral territory. Upon this Sarrail at once decided to expel the enemy consuls, and in the afternoon of the day of the aeroplanes' visit they were arrested with all their families and staffs and deported. Search of the consulates, which some months later were taken over for General Staff purposes, confirmed to the full the suspicions that had centred round them.

The seizing of the Greek forts of Karaburnu, which command the entrance to the harbour of Salonica, was the second act by which circumstances forced the Allies to tighten their grip on the town which was their base.

In December, 1915, when M. Pallis came from Athens to see General Sarrail, with the so-called

mission of dissipating misunderstandings between the Greek Government and the Allies, Sarrail mentioned that the naval command at Salonica insisted that the question of the forts of Karaburnu should be examined, as they were in a position to do much harm to the Allied Fleet and cut off the town from the sea. Pallis promised on behalf of King Constantine that whatever happened the forts of Karaburnu should not fire—"whatever," though unexpressed, meaning of course the eventuality of an overwhelming enemy attack obliging the Allies to evacuate the Balkans and re-embark at Salonica. The matter was left at that. But the practical situation was so little improved by this vague pledge that at length General Sarrail was informed that the French Minister of Marine had ordered the French naval forces at Salonica to occupy Karaburnu.

The Allied naval commanders consulted together about this and decided that although of course the ships could, in the event of resistance, shell the forts, it would be more convenient for the purposes of permanently occupying them that the Army should furnish a contingent of the garrison. The seizure of the forts was, indeed, an operation which needed careful preparation, for our naval captive balloon in H.M.S. *Canning* had been up every day taking photographs which clearly showed that the Greeks were busy building new gun-emplacements. We later found that they had also laid in a stock of armour-piercing shells of recent pattern.

Admiral Gaucher, the French admiral commanding in the Eastern Mediterranean, accordingly got into touch with General Sarrail, and it was arranged to make a joint operation of it, the whole of the Allied fleets being represented, the Italian *Piemonte* and the Russian *Askold*, then at Salonica, taking part as well as French and English ships, the latter also landing marines.

## 96 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

The seizure of the forts was made on the morning of January 28th, 1916. It was very thoroughly arranged by the French, and all precautions for overcoming resistance were taken. The delicacy of the operation lay in the fact that at that time our relations with the Greeks were very near to breaking-point, and it would have needed little more than a fight at Karaburnu for us to have had the whole Greek Army on top of us.

Three thousand French troops were the main force employed. They marched round behind Salonica towards Karaburnu Point, on the east side of the Gulf, coming fifty miles in two days. At 10.30 p.m., on the night before the forts were to be occupied, they cut the telephone wires connecting them with the Greek garrison and headquarters at Salonica. At 7 a.m. on January 28th our contingent of 100 marines landed from I.L.M.S. *Albion* and reported to Colonel Curie, the French officer who was in command of the whole operation. They were placed on the left wing of the attacking party. Several English battalions were farther back, in reserve for eventualities, but were kept in ignorance of what was going on, being led to their positions by Staff officers and after remaining there two days were marched back to camp again.

The forts were really rather shore batteries than forts properly so-called. Their normal garrison was 250 men. There were two 8.4-in. guns in the main battery, which had been inherited from the Turks and of which the "strips" on the sights with Turkish numerals had not even been replaced. Two 6-in. Armstrong guns and some German field-guns formed the rest of the armament.

The French troops with the party of British marines then advanced on the forts, making occasional halts of about twenty minutes. Each time this happened

the French threw up "scrapes" of earth in front of them, and when they got to within 2,500 yards of the forts the mountain guns were put together and dug in too. There was a screen of cavalry behind, cutting off all connection with Salonica, and three Farman acroplanes overhead. No chances were taken, for the stake was great. We were really in a weak position at Salonica, for all our apparent strength. King Constantine was believed to be even eager for a pretext to be driven into hostilities against us, and if a fight with the Greeks had started, supported as it would have been very quickly by German detachments rushed down the railway, we should have been in an unpleasant situation, with our backs to the sea and a hostile and treacherous population all around us.

When the Allied force got near Karaburnu Point the English marines were ordered to go on ahead and occupy Tuzla Fort, an outlying work about three miles beyond the others. They set out and had gone some way when they met a detachment of Greek soldiers under a sergeant who at once halted his men and gave the order "Fix bayonets!" The English continued to advance with sloped arms and without bayonets fixed, when the Greek N.C.O. suddenly produced an automatic pistol and levelled it at the head of the marine captain in command of the party. On this, the marines halted and the intelligence officer of the *Albion*, who had been brought up in Turkey and spoke Greek excellently, opened a parley. He said: "We have come to occupy the fort. It's quite all right. Everything has been fixed up by this time with the Greek C.O. at Karaburnu."

The N.C.O., on this, said that he would let them pass if they would give him time to send a messenger back to Tuzla to ring up Karaburnu. The messenger was sent, but it afterwards transpired that he took

## 98 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

a recommendation to the Greek officer there to serve out ball-cartridge and prepare to defend the fort.

Our men continued to advance along the barren coast-line, and when they reached Tuzla found some of the garrison lining a breastwork in front of the fort and the rest in the windows of the red brick building used as a barracks. The subaltern in command came out to parley. He said that his C.O. had gone to Salonica on forty-eight hours' leave. He refused to let the marines enter, so the English captain sent back to the French to say that he was held up. The garrison of the fort was only seventy strong, but they were behind cover and in any case the possible consequences of a fight were so serious that it had to be avoided except as a last extremity. A French officer soon arrived, and he, together with the captain of marines, again addressed the young subaltern. "You must surrender to superior force," they said. "If you resist, the Fleet has orders directly it hears the sound of firing to shell every strategic point in Salonica." (This was true; the battleships and monitors had their guns ready trained on the barracks and public buildings.) This argument was strong enough, and the Greek subaltern, who had throughout the parley been at a white heat of indignation, opened the gates of the fort. He explained that he had taken part in the first Balkan War, and had helped to turn the Turks out of these very forts, "and now you've turned us out," he added despondently.

Meanwhile the French had occupied the other forts and the whole of the dangerous position of Karaburnu was in our hands before the Greek headquarters in Salonica knew that anything was even projected.

When our men had installed themselves in the captured fort, there was an old Turk who used to come to sell vegetables to them, whose white beard

would shake with laughter as he handed them over the gate. The interpreter asked him what he was laughing at. "Ah! it is such a pleasure," said the old man, "to see the English instead of the Greeks where my brothers the Turks used to be."

So things went on, in an atmosphere of considerable strain, although the French were giving the Greeks the use of twenty motor-lorries daily to supply Seres and other places up-country with food, at an expense to themselves of £50 per day. Gratitude, however, was not a conspicuous feature of the temperament of the people with whom we had to deal. It was remarkable how instinctively and unanimously the soldiers of the different Allied armies—as heterogeneous a collection as possible of characters, tastes and standards of conduct—agreed in detesting the Greek at this time.

Thousands of Greeks, men, women and children, have been taken into the service of the British Army as labourers and muleteers. The stone-breaking for the ceaseless repair of those new and hard-used roads with which we have laced the desert of Macedonia is all done by civilian labour, paid from three to seven francs a day (the higher rate for foremen), fed and housed in large camps under British officers who speak the local tongues. Every mile or two as you drive you will find the road lined on both sides with a black fringe of these peasants, refugees or local villagers—of all the races of the Balkans, Serb, Turkish, Bulgar (though of Greek allegiance), the mixed race that calls itself "Macedonian," Kutzo-Vlach, and Greek. Full-trousered old grannies with grey hair, hammering industriously away, sit alongside youngsters with chubby (and very dirty) bare feet, chipping just as vigorously. The men and the boys—harder-working boys than I have seen anywhere—do the heavier wheelbarrow work, and all of



## 100 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

them are under the benign but alert control of an English sergeant whose acquaintance with Balkan tongues ends at "Hidey"—a general word of incitement—but who gives orders by means of the phrase, "Hi, Johnny," followed by expressive pantomime. "Johnny" was the term used from the first by the British soldier as the only way of addressing an inhabitant of Macedonia, and the population of the Balkans, imitative as parrots, have responded by adopting it on their part for us. "Shine, Jawhnnie?" screech the Salonica shoeblacks as you walk the muddy streets, hammering their boxes with the backs of their brushes. "Penny, Jawhnnie," whine the gipsy brats, running along at your elbow and making disconcerting efforts to kiss the skirt of your coat. "Finish, Johnny," is a phrase likely to be a permanent addition to the vocabulary of the Balkans for expressing the simple idea that it conveys.

Aboriginal though the workers of the road-gangs look in their rough and generally filthy national dress, they sometimes give you a surprise. On a rough hill road in a lonely region, where I had stopped with a boiling radiator, a black, rough-coated fellow with the cowl of his picturesque frieze jerkin drawn over his head—a sort of foreman of the gang at work there—came and stood by the car. "Isn't that a fine type of savage?" I said casually to my companion. The next remark to be made came in fluent trans-Atlantic English from the object of this faint praise of mine. "Guess you wahut some wahter?" he said. "I'll send one my fellers fetch you some." I started in some confusion. "Where did you learn English?" I asked, though the question was needless.

"Buffalo, five year," he jerked in reply. "Ye-es, I'd like fine get back there, too. This country no dam use, anyhow. No money. Can't get away, though, now."

They all say they want to get back to America as a matter of fact. But the homing instinct in the inhabitant of the Balkans, and particularly the Greek, is so strong that he will leave the new-found civilisation of street-cars and telephones and soda-fountains and cinemas as soon as he has saved a little money, and return all the way again to his remote, squalid, muddy, tumble-down village where nothing but the dreary monotony of a peasant's life on the reluctant soil awaits him.

The Greek Muleteer Corps that we enlisted was at first dressed in khaki uniform, with only a tin badge on the arm as a distinguishing mark, and one used to have the shock of meeting what seemed to be the most rapscallion, untidy mob of English drivers you had ever set eyes on. Later on, however, the Muleteer Corps' dress was changed to black tunics and slouch hats. They get three drachmas (2s. 6d.) a day all found. They are not so good as English drivers, of course, but transport is such an immense problem in the Balkans that we had to have more drivers from somewhere, and Greek labour was the only solution. It is always undesirable, of course, to use aliens in the zone of an army in the field, and on a few occasions some of these people have been found carrying letters with spy-reports for the enemy, which they were to hide in pre-arranged places to be fetched by other agents, but we have never had enough men in the Balkans to do anything big as it is, and we should have had fewer combatants still if we had had to find drivers for all the horse and mule transport that we use.

Rupel is a black word with our Army in the Balkans. When the Bulgars suddenly advanced and took over from the Greeks (by previous secret arrangement) the fort that commands the Struma valley, they threw a five-barred gate across the only

## 102 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

way by which we might later on have been able to advance into Bulgaria. The Bulgars stopped the gap we might have gone through. They put themselves across the path of any advance northward, and on the flank of any advance eastward. Since then the wall of strong positions over against us has been complete, and to achieve anything on what later became the British sector of the front it was made practically inevitable that we should first attack the strong position of Rupel.

Why did not the French, whose troops were on the Struma at the time, seize and hold Fort Rupel before the Bulgars got there? It is a question that has been often asked. Certainly we had plenty of reasons to expect that they would advance on the fort. What restrained the French General Staff from occupying it, however, was that, with the limited forces which General Sarrail had at his disposition, it would only have been possible to send a regiment (say 2,000 men) to hold it and the mouth of the defile which it protected. This would not have prevented the Bulgars from coming down in force, and the destruction or the capture of the isolated garrison thrust far out in advance of the main Allied Army would have been a defeat for us and an injury to our cause.

It was on the morning of May 26th that the Bulgarian force sent to seize Rupel appeared in the valley of the Struma. At first it was reported as one brigade strong, then as one division. The infantry of the force seems to have consisted of three whole regiments and part of another, and there was also artillery, three companies of German sappers, and some Uhlans. The enemy came in three columns, of which the centre one moved on Rupel. The fort had a Greek garrison, of course, the Greek Army being still in occupation of Serres

and Demir Hissar, and as the Bulgars approached the Greeks fired a few shells at them—a *pro forma* resistance evidently—to which the Bulgars made no reply, but instead sent at noon a white flag to demand the surrender of the fort. The officer in command said that he could not give it up without orders from Athens, so a delay was granted for these to be obtained, and at 2.30 p.m. the telegraphic order came that the Greek garrison was to evacuate the fort and withdraw to Demir Hissar. So the Greek flag was hauled down and the Bulgarian one hoisted. The Bulgars and Germans signed an inventory of the contents of the fort, and told General Bayeras that they only wanted it for defensive purposes, to stop an Allied move northwards. A telegram to the Athens Government from General Bayeras, who commanded the 6th Greek Division at Serres, which came to the knowledge of the French General Staff, goes far to confirm the idea that Rupel was surrendered by King Constantine to his friends and our enemies by deliberate previous collusion. "The Germans and Bulgars arrived at Demir Hissar station this morning to occupy it," telegraphed the General a day or two later. "I told them that I could not hand over the station without previous reference to you, because the transference of Demir Hissar station was not comprised in the treaty."

Only a year later, in July, 1917, did it become known, from the disclosures made by the re-established Venizelist Government in Athens, that, immediately before handing over Fort Rupel to the Germans and their Allies, King Constantine's Government had obtained (as the price of it) a loan of £3,000,000 from the German Government, while at the same moment, with characteristic duplicity, it was trying to avail itself of the long-suffering benevolence of the Allies to get another loan of £5,000,000 out of them.

## 104 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Demir Hissar station was occupied immediately after Rupel, treaty or no treaty, and the Bulgarians, crossing the Greek frontier at other points, waited only until they were ready to make a simultaneous push on the other flank of the Allied front before carrying the zone of their occupation down to Kavalla, so that it enclosed our positions in a great arc. At Kavalla part of the garrison under Colonel Hatzopoulos went over to the side which had always had their sympathies and were carried off to Berlin for "training." Colonel Christodoulo, who had brought down a contingent of anti-Bulgar Greeks from Seres, got across to Thasos island and so back to Salonica, where he was received by the population with hero-worship, and later became the first General of the Venizelist forces. Salonica, as a part of New Greece, was indeed much perturbed by the invasion of the Struma valley by the Bulgars. Her townspeople remembered by what precarious means Salonica had become Greek, and they knew that the Bulgars aimed, and aim still, definitely and ardently, at recapturing the coveted port in which their troops temporarily set footing during the first Balkan War. There was a large public meeting of protest against the action of the Greek Government, held in Salonica, which the Royalist municipal authorities tried in vain to prevent, and from that time a feeling of resentment and apprehension grew among the townspeople and the officers of the garrison until it brought about the "Revolution" of August 30th.

Following upon the Bulgarian descent into Greek territory, and their seizure, by connivance with the Greek Government, of the fort of Rupel, General Sarrail (on June 3rd) seized the control at Salonica of the services of communication and of the police force of the town. The step was one essential to our military security. It was the knowledge which

reached the French General Staff of the telegram to the Greek Government, proving its complicity in the advance of the Bulgarians against us, that armed Sarrail's hand. His reply to the surrender of Fort Rupel was the proclamation of martial law at Salonica and throughout the zone of the Allied Armies, and the military occupation of the public buildings of the town. With the swiftness and decision which are characteristic of Sarrail's actions, the step was taken on King Constantine's birthday, the preparations for the celebration of which were hastily called off as French patrols with fixed bayonets suddenly appeared before all the public buildings and at every street corner. The civil administration of the town, except Posts and Telegraphs and police, was left in the hands of the Greeks, but several officials who had been particularly active in their hostility to the Allies, such as Troupakis, the head of the gendarmerie, were expelled.

I will not go into the question of the blockade of the Greek coast by which we brought pressure to bear on Athens. That was a political matter ordered in the first place by the French Minister of Marine, the French Government acting as the delegate of the Allies in the relations of the Entente with Greece. Several times troops were embarked at Salonica to go and lie off Athens ready to land if the Greek Government proved obstinate. Dense secrecy prevailed, of course, about these movements, and rumours of the greatest variety about their destination would spring up in the town like mushrooms after rain.

As a result of these demonstrations, we won some pseudo-concessions from the royalist Government at Athens. Thus after June 21st, when we threatened to occupy the capital, the King agreed to demobilise his army—but he proceeded to arm civilians, who formed bands of irregulars in our rear just as capable

## 106 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

of giving us trouble as Greek uniformed troops would have been.

At length, at the end of August, 1916, came the "Salonica Revolution." This was an outburst of the indignation of the Greeks of Macedonia against the simultaneous invasion of still larger tracts of both Eastern and Western Macedonia by the Bulgars, which took place in August, when they occupied Florina and Banitza and advanced to Lake Ostrovo in the west and pushed on to Kavalla in the east.

By a sudden and rather dramatic upheaval, such as appeals to the Greek temperament, allegiance to King Constantine and the Athens Government was renounced by the majority of the Salonica garrison and population and the resistance of the Royalist minority was overcome after five minutes' fighting in the dark. The "Revolution" had the distinct advantage for the Allies of clarifying the situation. The transference by the revolutionaries of their adherence from King Constantine to the Entente made General Sarrail's authority supreme in Salonica. And after that there was no more trouble.

A revolutionary feeling had been growing in Macedonia ever since the Greek troops, under orders from the Athens Government, abandoned Fort Rupel and a considerable extent of Greek territory to Bulgarian occupation. The jealous hatred which is the chief feature of the international relations of the Balkan races was stirred to frenzy, and a really bitter feeling of indignation sprang up and grew against the pro-German king and his Ministers; nor was this indignation based solely upon sentiment. Well-founded apprehension had no small part in it. The graves were still fresh of the victims of the Bulgarian massacres at Doxato, in the very district which was now tamely surrendered to them. The hopes of this Greek pro-Ally party which was forming

at Salonica had been raised for a moment during the last week of August by the news from Athens that General Dousmanis, Chief of the General Staff, the arch-enemy of the Entente, and principal pro-German plotter, had lost his post, and been replaced by General Moschopoulos, who had previously commanded the Greek Army Corps at Salonica. But though Moschopoulos had been personally friendly with the Allied Staffs, he was above everything a professional soldier, anxious not to forfeit his post for political reasons, and he quickly came into the orbit of King Constantine and the pro-Germans with whom he had to work in Athens.

And the last circumstance which encouraged the pro-Ally party at Salonica to pass from sympathy to action was the fact of Roumania's entry into the war.

It must be remembered—though the recollection is bitter now—that it was then expected with confidence that this event marked the beginning of the triumph of our Balkan campaign. Bulgaria would be crushed by a converging attack from both sides. Russia—mysterious, but with her strength as yet undoubted—would begin an irresistible offensive at the same time; the Allies at Salonica would march victoriously forward through the Balkans. There would be redistribution of territories and a recasting of frontiers, and from all this, Greece, as the pro-Ally party at Salonica felt, would be shut out and left without a friend in the world.

So on the afternoon of August 30th a proclamation suddenly appeared on the walls of Salonica, addressed to the Greek people and the Greek Army and signed by Colonel Zimbrakakis, the leader of the movement, by Colonel Mazarakis, by the Venizelist deputy for Seres, and half a dozen other lesser personages, over the title, "Committee of National Defence." In brief, what they said was, "The present state of



## 108 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

affairs has lasted long enough. The surrender to the Bulgars of Greek forts and territories is a betrayal of the fatherland to foreign interests. The time has come for Greece to place herself by the side of the Powers of the Entente, who have always been her friends." The proclamation urged the Greek soldiers at Salonica to reject all further orders from Athens and to join the Allies in driving the Bulgars off Greek soil.

The news spread through the town that the Greek gendarmerie—largely Cretans, and therefore Venizelists—had joined the movement in a body, and that the officers of the three Greek regiments at the barracks were holding a meeting to discuss their attitude. Meanwhile Colonel Zimbrakakis, at the head of the gendarmes, all wearing a blue and white silk armlet, which was to be the badge of the Revolution, and followed by a nondescript crowd of volunteers, hastily equipped with any weapons available, marched through the town to offer his services and theirs to General Sarrail. The side-street in front of French Headquarters was packed with an excited crowd, for the Greek loves political demonstration above any form of entertainment. Colonel Zimbrakakis made an impassioned speech from horseback amid loud cheers of "Zito!" then went in to offer the support of his adherents to the Allied cause for the liberation of Macedonia. Sarrail accepted the proffered services, having already been in the habit of taking Greek volunteers into the French Army since the Bulgars came into Greece. At the same time he issued a general warning that he would intervene if public order were disturbed. Though there was no definite repudiation of loyalty to the Greek Crown, I heard many cries from the crowd of "Down with the King!" and there was a feeling in Salonica that night that trouble was in the

air. All British troops were ordered out of the town at dusk, but everything remained quiet until 4.30 a.m. next morning.

My own quarters when in Salonica happened to be in a house looking directly on to the broad parade-ground which lies in front of the main barracks, and I was suddenly awakened by a violent rifle-fire very close at hand. One always thinks instinctively of aircraft nowadays when disturbed by explosive noises at night, but this tumult evidently required another explanation. It was a pitch-black night. I went out on to the verandah at the back of the house to find the whole of the parade-ground flickering with the flashes of rifles. Bullets were flying to every point of the compass. Some hit my house, which was at right angles to the line of fire, others fell in Allied camps a mile away. Then came much whistling and shouting and the firing gradually died down and stopped. But the creaking of wheels and the noise of footsteps and lowered voices told of the presence of a good many men. It was evident that the revolutionary gendarmes were attacking the Royalist infantry and cavalry in their barracks.

Dawn came in an hour or so, and the position grew clearer. Overnight the revolutionary gendarmes had demanded the surrender of the barracks by the cavalry and infantry that occupied them. The officers of the latter refused, and when the time fixed by the revolutionaries for the evacuation of the building arrived the Royalists posted their men along the front wall of the tree-filled garden. At 4.30 a.m., suspicious of the silence and fearing a surprise attack, they sent out from the barracks a reconnoitring patrol of sixty men. These were groping across the parade-ground in the dark when they ran into the gendarmes silently assembling to invest the barracks. Each

## 110 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

side thought that the other was attacking and began to fire wildly.

And now at daylight there they were, the blue-coated gendarmes lying down lining the tramway-street on one side of the parade-ground, the khaki soldiers behind the wall of the barracks on the other. A dead horse and a few pools of blood lay about, but the losses in the splutter of rifle-fire were only one killed and two wounded on the side of the gendarmes, and two killed among the Royalist troops. One or two Greek civilians, poor vagabonds sleeping out, also stopped stray bullets.

There is a long and unsavoury stream-bed that runs along one side of the parade-ground past the bottom of my garden. It was amusing to watch from the roof of the house Royalist and revolutionary skirmishers begin simultaneously to steal along this, each hidden from the other by the twists and turnings in it. They would get within about thirty yards before catching sight of each other, then both would bob down with great alacrity and lie there under cover, with their rifles ready to fire.

But there was to be no more fighting. Some of the civilian volunteers, looking very comitadji-like in plain clothes with assorted rifles and bandoliers, did indeed arrive, and seemed to be gathering for a flank attack under the corner of my house, but their spirits were so undecided that when a Royalist officer came out of the barracks, walked up to them and began to abuse them, they only listened sheepishly in awkward silence. "If we get hold of Zimbkakakis," remarked this officer amiably, "we will cut him in pieces."

But General Sarrail had already decided that the Greeks could not be allowed to settle their political differences by sniping each other in the streets of the town that was his military base. So at 6 a.m.

A hundred French infantry and half a troop of cavalry marched on to the Champ de Mars with the deliberate and business-like air of police arriving at a pacifist demonstration. Half-an-hour later a thousand more followed. They lined the sides of the parade-ground, sent two platoons round to the back of the barracks, set up their machine-guns, and lay down, ready to open fire at a word. An anti-aircraft motor-lorry drew up and trained its field-gun on to the main gate of the royalist fortress at 800 yards' range. A battery of six trench-mortars was set out in a suitable position. Three aeroplanes came and circled overhead.

The garrison at the barracks watched these cold-blooded preparations with evident dismay. Heads kept on bobbing up and down anxiously behind the wall. Were the revolutionary gendarmes being reinforced by the French for a joint attack to overwhelm the royalist defenders and convert them at the point of the bayonet? The outpost in the stream-bed was recalled inside. Then a little convoy of empty carts came very peaceably out of the main gate, presumably to fetch the day's rations, and try to restore things to a normal basis by following out the regular routine. The revolutionary pickets sternly turned it back, however, to the undisguised discouragement of the garrison, who had been watching the fate of this important mission with anxiety.

It was curious to see how little attention the ordinary population of Salonica paid to these happenings. They went streaming past on foot and in the trams along the street at the bottom of the parade-ground, hardly turning their heads to notice the blue-coated revolutionaries and the khaki-coated royalists facing each other with arms in their hands at the side of the street. A population that has seen so many uprisings and disorders within the last few

## 112 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

years—the bullet-holes in the walls have not yet been filled up after the street fighting between Greeks and Bulgarians in 1913—could hardly be expected to give great attention to so haphazard a bickering as this.

At 10.30 General Sarrail arrived on the parade-ground. At the same time about fifty royalist officers without their swords trooped out of the barracks and walked across to a building on the parade-ground, where Sarrail followed them. The interview was of a few minutes only, and it took place standing. General Sarrail is always energetic and decisive, and he dominated this situation very completely. "I don't want to mix myself up between Greek and Greek," he said, "but I will not have shooting going on in the streets of this town which is my base and headquarters," and, turning to Colonel Tricoupis, the leader of the royalists, Sarrail told him bluntly that he must come at once to a peaceful settlement. Tricoupis replied that the royalist officers refused to have any dealings with their revolutionary opponents, but that they had no objection to concluding an agreement with the French. On this, Sarrail called for their immediate surrender, and pointed out that he had troops of his own there in considerable strength to enforce submission if it were refused. The officers, he said, could keep their swords. The men would be disarmed and marched to the French camp at Zeitenlick.

The surrender demanded was accorded without further resistance. The "revolution" was over, and the Committee of National Defence, taking over the administration of Salonica, though French martial law continued to exist there, issued next day a decree mobilising the 1915 class throughout

Macedonia, which was the beginning of the co-operation of Greek forces with the Allies in the field.

Meanwhile the movement spread to other towns of the province and gradually gathered strength.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RESURRECTION OF THE SERBIAN ARMY.

IN December, 1915, the Serbian Army had ceased to exist. The retreat across the Albanian mountains in the snow had left it no more than a rabble of literally starving men. Yet in May, 1917, the Serbian Army was in being again. It was certainly reduced to less than a third of its original numbers, but it was a fighting force once more and stood by the side of its Allies at Salonica.

This reconstruction or rather re-creation of the Serbian Army is one of the finest feats of organisation that the Allies have performed in the whole war. The credit of it is due not only to the unquenchable patriotism and spirit of the Serbs but to the resourcefulness, the energy and the tact of the "Military Missions," one of which was sent out by each of the Allied Powers to meet that rout of half-demented survivors of the sufferings of Albania, to feed them, clothe them, equip them, help them to get back their military efficiency and finally transport them to our base in the Balkans, from where they might begin again their struggle against the tyrannical invaders of their country.

The terrible story of the retreat across Albania has been vividly told by those who went through it. There is no record in history of so ghastly a march. It surpasses in horror the story of the Grande Armée's



withdrawal from Moscow. The tracks the starving host followed through the snow-covered mountains were marked by a trail of corpses. Austrian prisoners and Serbian civilians were mixed haphazard with the disorganised army. The former were "marching towards Scotland through the snow," as I heard a survivor of the retreat describe it, for the English Government had offered to find accommodation in Scotland for the Austrian prisoners of Serbia. Few of the Serbian civilians survived their sufferings. The banks of the Skumbi river were strewn for days with the corpses of well-dressed men, women and children, refugees from Belgrade, whose strength had failed in fording the stream. They lay there till the dogs devoured them.

Literally without any food at all for days together the long files of wretched men plodded on through rain and snow, over precipitous goat-tracks and through waist-deep marshes. Often they had to turn and drive off attacks from the treacherous Albanians, and many a man preferred death by his own rifle or by sinking into the fatal sleep of utter exhaustion in the snow to a continuance of such sufferings.

And it is morally certain that even the strongest, who kept on through it all to the end, would have died when they reached the coast of the Adriatic if it had not been for the system of food supply which the Allies organised. At Scutari many men did not touch food for six days. The officers were able to buy a little bread at 12s. to 15s. a loaf.

The British Military Mission, whose headquarters had now been established at Rome, had organised with great difficulty a service of pack-animal food convoys from Medua to supply the Serbians at Scutari. The apprehension that the food ships might be attacked by the Austrians delayed their

## RESURRECTION OF THE SERBIAN ARMY 117

sailing. One ship, indeed, went down with a loss of sixty English A.S.C. details.

The Serbs were so exhausted, however, that for a few days it looked as though they would never find the heart to make another effort. But if the Serbian Army was yet to be saved they must once more set out on another march of five or six days, over swampy ground, and in danger of attack from the Albanians, as far as Valona. To have embarked them north of that port would have been to take a big risk of attack from the Austrian fleet lying at Cattaro.

The only way to encourage the Serbs to start out again for Durazzo was to create food depots along the road. The decision, indeed, to make the Serbs undertake this fresh journey was a desperate one. The men were so weakened by dysentery that many were simply swallowed in the marshes on the road, not having enough strength to struggle out of them. On this part of their journey to safety the British Mission saved thousands of lives. They organised ferries across the rivers, improved the road in the worst places, and saw to it that the dispirited soldiers had enough, but not more than enough, food to take them on their way, for after their weeks of starvation many of them tended to eat more than their enfeebled constitutions would stand, and so died when their hardships were all but over.

From Valona the Serbs were transported by the French very expeditiously to Corfu. The 80,000 men who marched down from Scutari were increased to 130,000 by another contingent which had made straight for Valona. But even when the safety of Corfu was reached the exhausted Serbs were still in a desperate condition. The Serbian Government has since bought the land where many of them are buried, in the little island opposite Corfu town that was used as a quarantine station, and on it a memorial

## 118 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

will be raised after the war to those who died there.

It took some time to organise—in abominable weather—the housing and feeding of the dispirited host at Corfu. The Allied Missions only arrived there a week before the men, and transport had to be imported, and piers built for the supply of so great a multitude.

The refitting and re-equipment of the Serbian Army had been arranged by an Allied conference at Paris. The French provided rifles and artillery, and the feeding and clothing of the destitute army was shared in equal proportions by France and England.

Gradually, as the spring drew on, the Serbians got back their strength again, and the work of re-organising them into an army could be begun.

Another and equally difficult process, however, yet remained to be performed. The Serbs had to be transported to Salonica through waters where enemy submarines were waiting for this very chance. So closely did they keep their watch on the island that they were even seen by Serbian troops at drill on the shore. The French were responsible for the organising of this transport of the Serbs to Salonica, and they did it extremely well. Fifteen transports and two auxiliary cruisers were available for the work, each vessel making three and a half voyages a month. The first shipload of Serbs reached Salonica on April 15th, and the last had arrived several days before the end of May.

Not a man was lost on the voyage, and, greatly though this redounds to the secrecy and efficiency with which the French made their plans, much of the credit is also due to the British trawlers which helped to escort the Serbian troopships, patrolling and sweeping up mines in the waters through which they were to pass. The transports left Corfu in

## RESURRECTION OF THE SERBIAN ARMY 119

pairs with an escort of destroyers. They would start out as if heading for Marseilles or Bizerta, and, when away from the island, alter course and zig-zag the rest of the way to Salonica. The enemy submarine commanders certainly missed a remarkably good opportunity. It can scarcely be that they were lulled into inactivity by the negotiations that were carried on as a bluff by the Allies with the Greek Government for the transport of the Serbians from Patras overland.

Special piers had been built for the arrival of the new contingent at Micra, a deserted spot on the shores of the Gulf of Salonica east of the town, and there two or three vessels would arrive regularly during the night. While the process of discharging was going on French gendarmes kept anyone from approaching the pier, and everything in connection with their arrival was carried out with the greatest secrecy.

An entire town of tents and huts and storehouses had soon sprung up on the empty green flats of Micra and the Vasilika valley, and the big, brawny, simple-mannered men, all with their characteristically-shaped caps, but some wearing English khaki and some French horizon-blue, began to add yet another costume to the motley aspect of the Salonica streets.

The Serbs even possessed the nucleus of a navy. Admiral Troubridge, who was in command of the international naval division which helped to defend Belgrade, had arranged for the training of about forty men, who had mostly been boatmen on the Danube, by cruises in British warships. They wore British uniform, except for the cap-ribbon, and the fact that the officers were in soldiers' khaki.

Their little craft, the *Greater Serbia*, was an old Greek torpedo-boat that had since been used as a ferry-boat, and was bought by the Serbian Govern-

## 120 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

ment at Corfu. There was a story that, when it was about to be brought round from Corfu to Salonica, her captain applied to the Allied Military Missions for a gun to be mounted on board. But the Allies gravely replied that as the *Greater Serbia* would probably make the voyage to Salonica on the deck of a transport they considered that a gun was hardly necessary.

But, though unarmed, the little steamer with the Serbian ensign at the stern did useful, though humble, work at Salonica in towing men and stores from place to place on the shores of the Gulf.

It was a remarkable thing, but one that is significant of the buoyancy of their spirits, that, in spite of past sufferings and present exile, the Serbians immediately on their arrival at Salonica began to entertain their comrades of the other Allied Armies. They showed eagerness to make closer acquaintance with them, and their own hospitality and frank, open ways caused a particularly close feeling of friendship to spring up between the Serbs and our English soldiers, though most of these had never in their lives seen a Serbian before, nor had they one word of common language. The Serbian "slava"—a sort of regimental festival and feast—became a new feature in the social life of Salonica, though it was one which required considerable robustness on the part of foreign guests unused to hospitality on the Serbian scale.

A "slava" would begin at about 9 a.m. It is an outdoor affair and the first hour or two would be devoted to a religious service, with quaint rites like the blessing and ceremonial cutting up of a cake, and to military parades and speeches; "slavas" usually commemorate the exploits of some hero or a battle against the Turks in the Middle Ages, for, as Mr. Lloyd George has since said, this little people since

## RESURRECTION OF THE SERBIAN ARMY 121

the fourteenth century has kept alive the memory of its defeat by the Turks in the sure and certain hope of ultimate deliverance. Then about eleven o'clock, at a long table under an arbour of leaves, the officers of the regiment and their guests sit down to lunch. That lunch would last till three, and it left one with a vivid idea of what a mediæval baronial banquet must have been like. The succession of courses, many of them Serbian national dishes of unusual composition, seemed unending, and the colonel of the regiment, whom custom required not to sit down but to move constantly about looking after his guests, saw to it that one's glass was never empty for the frequent toasts that the presence of so many Allies of different nationalities made necessary.

Towards the end of luncheon the regimental band would appear in front of the arbour, followed by a rush of soldiers who join hands and begin to dance the "kola." Like most national dances of the Balkans the "kola" is a sort of sideways shuffle danced by any number of people, hand in hand, to a wailing skirl of flutes supported by a lot of banging on the drum. The Serbian officers would spring from their seats to join their men in this fandango, which would go on for an hour together, and it was evidence of the feeling of being at home with which the easy-going hospitality of the Serbs filled their guests that English and French officers would be drawn in too and skip and spring and caper without the slightest feeling of making themselves conspicuous.

The unbroken spirit of these big-built men simply astonished one. They had gone through more than any nation among the Allies. In each of the six years from 1912 to 1917 they have been at war. Their losses have been terrible. There is very little of the manhood of the nation left.

The whole hope of the regeneration of Serbia lay,

## 122 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

in fact, with those hundred thousand men who landed at Micra pier, and so heavily have the Serbs lost in the fierce fighting that they have since waged among the rocky hills on the banks of the Cerna that the repopulation of their country, when it has been won back again, will be a problem of the lack of fathers.

Yet it is rare to see a despondent Serb. "Those are my wife and children," a Serbian officer will say, showing you a photograph. "I have not seen them or heard of them since we left Belgrade in October, 1915. I have tried to get into touch with them by advertising in Swiss papers, which the Germans allow to be imported into Serbia, but I have had no reply. Whether they are alive or dead, whether they have money or are starving, even whether they have been allowed to remain in Serbia at all, I haven't the vaguest idea."

It is with such heavy griefs weighing upon each individual's mind that the Serbian Army has fought so stoutly, and that it yet rejects the offer, which the Bulgars and Austrians have held out, of bringing this suspense and separation to an end on the inglorious terms of national surrender.

The Serbian Crown Prince Alexander came among the first to Salonica, but his dark, aquiline face is not often seen by the people of the town. When he is there he keeps to the grounds of the villa that was reserved for him in a quiet side street, studying, as I found him already doing on the morning after his arrival, the maps which cover the table in his plainly furnished workroom, and receiving reports from the officers of his staff. His father, King Peter, for whom he acts as Regent, had reached Salonica from Corfu earlier in the year, but he maintains a strict seclusion. He has grown a beard which preserves him from recognition by any stranger who may

## RESURRECTION OF THE SERBIAN ARMY 128

catch sight of him, and except for a short visit to Vodená has hardly left his house in Salonica.

Prince George of Serbia, who was formerly the heir to the throne, but resigned the succession to his younger brother, is a familiar figure on the Serbian front. Very impetuous and entirely offhand in his actions, casually dressed, usually in a couple of muddy raincoats, the one underneath longer than the one on top, he makes no parade of princedom. "He is always the first out of the car to shove," says an English officer who often travels with him, and those who have motored much in the Balkans know how often the opportunity for energy and self-sacrifice of that kind arises. Prince George's readiness to expose himself to the risks of the firing line is conspicuous. He has arrived sometimes in the front lines just before an attack takes place and has gone over the parapet with the men. During this summer of 1917, indeed, the Prince has had his horse shot under him while reviewing Serbian troops close up to the front.

One may be permitted while on the subject of the Serbians to remark upon a happy innovation which the British Government has introduced into the maintenance of our relations with them. This is the attachment to the staff of the Serbian Crown Prince of a senior British officer of wide experience in the person of Vice-Admiral E. T. Troubridge. Admiral Troubridge had greatly assisted in the defence of Belgrade during the autumn of 1915 when in command of an international naval force there. He organised a flotilla of gunboats on the Danube, and his naval guns were some of the most efficient artillery that the Serbian capital possessed. After accompanying the Serbian Army in its desperate retreat across Albania, the Admiral was sent out again to the Balkans to be attached to the Serbian Crown Prince



## 124 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

and to take command of the naval brigade that might have been despatched there had the campaign made progress.

But the services which so experienced an officer has been able to render to the relations, sometimes delicate, between ourselves and the Serbs have been more valuable even than those of an artillery commander in the field. With the knowledge of international relations which a former Chief of the War Staff possesses and with the assistance of such an expert in Balkan affairs as Commander Alfred Stead, his flag officer, Admiral Troubridge has done more than any one individual to keep our relations with the Serbians at the degree of cordiality and confidence which has always characterised them. When our attitude in some matter has puzzled the Serbs they have come to him for explanation and re-assurance. When they have had some view which they wished to put before our Government it has often been to Admiral Troubridge that it was submitted first. This rôle of super-liaison officer, or unofficial military ambassador (for the Serbian nation is now no more than its army), is one that might well be renewed in our relations with others of our Allies; though it is true that its value and success depend entirely upon the personality and the abilities of the man chosen to fulfil it.

And while the whole of the Serbian nation that is free is now based upon Salonica as an army in the field, the machinery of the Serbian Government, left without a country to administer, has waited patiently at Corfu. Had our recapture of Monastir been followed, as was expected, by the repulse of the Bulgars as far as Prilep, the Serbian Ministry would have been brought back on to its own territory and regained a limited exercise of its functions. But Monastir is still a place where you need a shrapnel

## RESURRECTION OF THE SERBIAN ARMY 125

helmet and a gas mask, so the Government of Serbia has remained until now in its exile at Corfu.

I went to Corfu in the spring of 1917 and was received there by M. Pasitch, the aged Serbian Prime Minister. The island is another of those places which the war has strangely transmogrified. Despite its five-storied, green-shuttered, Italian-looking houses the atmosphere of the place is peculiarly English, but English of that mid-Victorian period when we abandoned it as a gift to the since ungrateful Greeks. Though you will hardly find an Englishman among the Serbs, Italians, French and Greeks, who at present throng its streets, the stamp of our occupation was solidly enough impressed to be apparent still at every turn.

There is the heavy portico-fronted Government House, in a neo-Doric style which is the reproduction of similar official buildings that British architects were putting up at the same time all over the world, conservatively regardless of considerations of climate or convenience. Here you have the trim parade-ground, or Maidan or Belvedere, with its inevitable classic temple, looking as if it might be a part of Tunbridge Wells in the Regency days. Here is the Hotel St. George, with solid, heavy, shining mahogany furniture and a big tin mid-nineteenth century tub that is produced when you ask for a bath. The very shops and arcades persistently remind one of a sleepy little old-fashioned English country town. Randolph Caldecott might have drawn Widow Blaize looking out of those quaint little square-paned windows. You feel as if you expected to meet a crinoline or a bob-wig at every street corner.





*[Official Photograph.]*

OUR POLYGLOT ARMY IN THE BALKANS. (1 TO R, BACK ROW - ANNAMITE, TRINCHMAN, SINGALESE, ENGLISHMAN, RUSSIAN, ITALIAN, SERBIAN, PAPILY HIDDEN) IN FRONT--CRETAN, BRITISH, DIAN.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE COMING OF THE RUSSIANS AND ITALIANS.

SALONICA is a very museum of the Allies. Of the principal Allied Armies in the field only representatives of the Americans and Portuguese are lacking, and there used to be rumours that even they were coming. In the Balkans there is none of the isolation that keeps the armies of different nationalities apart in France. All of us rub shoulders at our common base of Salonica. The Annamite and the Serbian sit side by side in the tram without either finding the juxtaposition odd. A brigade of blonde Russians may be relieved by a brigade of black Senegalese. Italian, Frenchman, Englishman and Greek will share a table in a restaurant, and it is very satisfactory to find that in spite of his customary ignorance of any language but his own—in which respect he is no worse than the average Frenchman, however—the Englishman seems as generally popular all round as any of the Allies. He fraternises with the Russian—a particularly convivial soul; he exchanges inarticulate but hearty handshakes with the Serb; he embarks courageously upon conversations in his best Rouen French with the Frenchman; and as any number of the Italians speak English, he gets on all right with them.

But what a curse these obstacles of language are, and how much envy is aroused by the galling fluency of that Englishman over there whose parents sent

him to live in France at an age when most of us were at a private school. Of course, French is the common tongue of the Allied Armies, but few Englishmen can really speak that well enough to make conversation a pleasure, especially for the Frenchman whose ear is so sensitive to maltreatment of his beautiful tongue. I have a scheme for after the war for which I have already obtained the approval of Frenchmen, who suffer from the same barrier of tongues as we do. It is this. When peace comes it will leave the Frenchman—it may be said between ourselves—with an increased respect for English institutions and particularly for the character which is the unique educational product of the English public school; it will leave the Englishman with an increased respect for the brilliance and intelligence of the French, and with a determination that his sons, at least, shall not be so tongue-tied as their father was directly he left his own country. Many French parents will want their sons to have an education on the English system—games, prefects, corporal punishment, *esprit de corps*—that has produced the keen, sporting, gallant type of Englishman he has come to respect. But the Frenchman hates sending his boy abroad; he does not like going abroad himself—France is very properly the cream of the earth for him. And the Englishman does not care to send his son to a French *lycée* of the present type, great though the advantage of learning the French language well may be, because he does not wish the boy to lose the character-training of an English public school.

A big inter-Ally school in France, therefore, with English masters and organised on public school lines, would meet both these cases. The English boy will learn the language of the country and still live under the same regime as if he had gone to a school at home,

## COMING OF THE RUSSIANS AND ITALIANS 129

and the French boy will benefit from the same treatment.

To get the right spirit from the start, the best way to bring the scheme into being would perhaps be to bring about the amalgamation of some existing English school with a well-known *lycée* in France. The thing would want carrying out well in the way of buildings and equipment, and it ought to form a special sort of tie between the Allied countries.

The two Russian brigades that began to arrive on July 30th brought flat caps and sad-coloured linen blouses as an addition to the assortment of military costumes which throng the streets of Salonica. The men composing them were all volunteers for service abroad and were remarkable for their size. They seemed to average at least thirteen stone.

They marched up to their camp at Zeitenlick, where they had three months of vigorous training. People used to turn off the Lembet Road to see the Russians practising a charge. The line of hundreds of long thin Lebel bayonets, each with a heavy Russian shouting behind it, looked, as it came sweeping over a rise in the ground, about as formidable a thing as you could find in the way of human mechanism of the battlefield.

I was with these same Russians during part of their march up to the front before Monastir in October. It was beautiful to go into the little Greek church of a village near which they camped for the night and hear the deep-toned, musical Gregorian chanting of the responses from the mass of devout and stalwart soldiers crowded together in the dim light of the tapers feebly flickering before tawdry pictures of Orthodox saints.

On August 10th, only a few days before the battle of Ostrovo, related in the last chapter, the first detachments of a very strong Italian division, the



## 180 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

85th, under General the Marquis Petiti di Roreto, one of General Cadorna's most trusted lieutenants, arrived at Salonica.

They surprised the rest of the Allied Army in the Balkans. Very few, indeed, of us had then seen Italian soldiers in the field in this war. And we had not expected troops of such excellent quality. The men were rather on the small side, perhaps, but they were solid and stocky and bronzed by months of fighting in the Trentino. The smartness of the turn-out of both officers and rank and file struck one at once and has never since varied. The men's equipment is of a greenish-coloured leather that harmonises with the slate-grey of their uniform. The officers' clothes are cut with a graceful line that makes them picturesque without detracting from a soldierly appearance. There is a touch of brightness in the white neckcloth just showing above the collar that takes away from the dullness of a field-kit, and on the collar itself are pretty gorget-patches varying in colour, shape and material with the wearer's corps. An Italian officer tilts his smart, black-vizored *kepi* at a hardly discernible angle, but for all their well-dressed appearance the frequency of the blue ribbon of the medal for valour on the chests of these slim young soldiers and the bullet-tattered colours of their regiments were signs that they were no carpet knights—as indeed they soon proved by their remarkable efficiency in the Balkans.

Their march through Salonica from the Quay was watched with friendly curiosity by crowds. Walking alone, but of a stature that would have made him conspicuous anywhere, was their general, Petiti di Roreto, an Anak among men, about six feet four high and vast in breadth and solidity, who has since been promoted to the command of an Army Corps in Italy. It was he who three months later,

## COMING OF THE RUSSIANS AND ITALIANS 181

while in Monastir a few days after its capture, was badly wounded in the leg by a shell which killed several men close to him. Two of the orderlies who were with him tried to lift their huge general to carry him to cover, but could not move him, so they ran off to get help, leaving General Petiti to the care of a little Italian soldier about one-third his size, who, as the shells continued to burst near, kept on exclaiming, "Courage, general!" with such buoyancy that the prostrate general, despite the pain of his wound, could not help chuckling in his white beard. In February of this year I went to stay with General Petiti at his headquarters at Tepavci. He had just come back from the Italian Hospital in Salonica to re-join his division, although his wound was not yet healed.

The Italians needed no time to re-organise on landing at Salonica. They went up on September 1st to take over a sector of the Allied front line, along the Krusha-Balkan heights which face the Belashitza range, and carry our front round from the end of the Vardar-Doiran sector to the Struma valley. There they had an English division on their right and a French colonial division on their left. The division which the Italians relieved was also French.

The front they were to hold was twenty-seven miles long. It had as yet no wire in front of it, except about the scattered redoubts that took the place of a continuous line of trenches. It looked across the broad green valley to the high wall of the Belashitza beyond. Down this valley runs the line from Salonica to Constantinople after its sharp turn to the east at Doiran. There were, however, four isolated posts right across the valley at the foot of the Belashitza (Upper Poroi, Palmis, and two others), which the French had occupied.\* Each of the four villages was held by one company, and was so far from the possibility of

## 182 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

support that General Petiti decided to evacuate them. But on the day fixed for this—it was in the middle of September—the Bulgars suddenly attacked Poroi with a battalion and a half, under cover of a barrage from the Bulgarian guns up on the steep Belashitza slopes behind. The Italians could do nothing to silence these batteries, for it was a curious circumstance imposed by the formation of the ground in this sector that the artillery of either side was out of range of the other. Each side had its guns on the hills dominating the flat valley between, and neither could do more than put up extreme range barrages to cover its own infantry in an attack. The Italian company at Poroi was ordered to hold on there to the last in order to cover the retreat of the three companies in the other isolated villages. It was impossible to send out troops to reinforce these little outposts owing to the concentrated and continuous enemy barrage. So that, although three of the companies got back by noon to the Italian lines, the fourth, protecting their retreat at Poroi, became surrounded. It might then have surrendered, its duty done and hope of extricating itself being gone, but instead continued fighting all the afternoon. Night came, and still the rattle of their rifles and machine-guns did not cease. It was not until next day, after thirty-six hours of resistance, when their ammunition must have been exhausted, that the gallant two hundred, or what was left of them, brought their struggle to an end, probably by a charge, for cries of "*Avanti, Savoia!*" rang out across the valley to the saddened hearing of their comrades back on the Krusha-Balkan. Then followed silence.

The first encounter of the Italians with the Bulgars had ended, not triumphantly, but \*with all the honours of war upon the side of our Allies.\*

## COMING OF THE RUSSIANS AND ITALIANS 188

When the 57th French Division on the Italian left was ordered away from the Krusha-Balkan to the Monastir front, the Italians at very short notice took over part of their line, and at the beginning of October, at the other end of their sector, they made a demonstration attack against Butkovo Djuma to assist the Serbians in their fighting in front of Monastir, in the same way as we at the same time attacked Zir, Bala and Yenikeuy.

But at the end of November the Italians were withdrawn from the Krusha-Balkan front.

The excellence of the roads, bridges and hutments that they had built, and the readiness with which they helped our men in the process of settling in, made a great impression on the English.

One of their brigades had the previous month gone up to Monastir; it was their headquarters in the newly captured city that General Petiti was visiting when he was wounded. The rest of the Italian division now moved up the same way, and by that end of December, 1916, had taken over the ground that the Serbs and the French had won in the loop of the Cerna river.

Of all the desolate country included in the long line of the Allies in the Balkans I think that ten miles of front in the "U" that the Cerna makes on the east of Monastir is the most dreary. Not a tree grows there; hardly a shrub. It is a savage waste of stones and rocks and boulders and ravines; the mountain-side slopes steeply; close ahead of you lowers the forbidding skyline of fierce crags and formidable cliffs. Except for infrequent and miserable hamlets, like Brod, and Veliselo and Tepavci, of a squalor unusual even in Macedonia, there is no sign of human habitation. Behind you lies the fertile flat of the plain of Monastir, with the Cerna marshes gleaming in the light, and beyond, fifteen miles

away, the fair prospect of the well-tilled mountains that bar off Lake Prespa. On that side much beauty, but ahead nothing but barren, unrelenting slopes. And if you took your eyes from the distant prospect to examine more closely the ground about you, what you saw there was grimmer still, for the rough surface of the ground was covered with an extraordinary litter of war material abandoned by the German troops who had unavailingly been hurried here to stiffen the Bulgarians in their resistance to the Serbian advance beyond the Cerna, which gradually levered the enemy out of Monastir. Unexploded hand grenades lay so thick that it was almost dangerous to walk, and certainly dangerous to ride about. There is a sort of German drumstick bomb which explodes five seconds after you pull a string; sometimes bombs of this kind were covered with earth, leaving only the string showing, and inquisitive Serbian and Italian soldiers occasionally would pull at these strings to see what was at the other end of them, with results fatal to themselves. Bayonets, smashed and twisted rifles, the fragments and fish-tails of aerial torpedoes, grey German helmets, and enough gas-masks to equip a brigade, were scattered everywhere. And it was one of the strange little contrasts of war on this desolate Macedonian height to pick up picture postcards showing the Zoologischer Garten, or some Berlin café that one had known well in years gone by, addressed to Fusilier Jakob Kautsky or to Gardejaeger Wilhelm Reinhardt, with those trivial little messages of news and love from home which the German soldiers, like our men, receive. Most gruesome of all the relics of the fierce fighting that had taken place in this Cerna sector were the graves of the German dead. For the ground had been too hard to bury them, and the mound of scraped-up earth and

## COMING OF THE RUSSIANS AND ITALIANS 185

stones, built instead over the body where it fell, had often been washed away by the winter rains, so that a pair of heavy field boots, a grey-clad shoulder, or an earthy hand thrust itself out from the grisly heap. A thankless land to fight for, it must have seemed to these German soldiers, that even refused them burial when they were dead.

This line, when the Italians took it over, was not well entrenched, but they set to work on it with all the energy and skill that they had learnt in fighting among the rocks of the Trentino. The Italians are extraordinarily efficient at mountain engineering.

Their transport system is another matter in which they especially excel. From their model motor-transport depot at the base to the topmost hauling station of their aerial cable ways in the mountains, they are thoroughly practical and efficient. To begin with, the Italians have only two types of motor-lorry, a fact which greatly simplifies the problem of spare parts, that was such a nightmare to the transport of other armies in the Balkans. They have a 25 h.p. 30-hundredweight Fiat lorry and a little 1-ton Itala of 14 "mule-power," as the Italian M.T. officers call it, because it will go up the steepest slopes and over the roughest surfaces.

The Italian Division's use of the single railway line, which they had to share with the French, Serbs and Russians, was limited to eighteen trucks a day as far as Sakulevo. They supplemented this, however, by long distance motor transport on the road.

To get stores from Sakulevo to Brod on the Cerna gave them another occasion for showing ingenuity. The little Sakulevo river flows from Sakulevo to Brod, where it falls into the Cerna, and the Italians partly economise the use of the eight miles of road between these two points by floating supplies in bridging pontoons down the river with the stream. Two

pontoons lashed together with two or three men to steer them carry two tons and at Brod the pontoons, when unloaded, are simply sent back in the lorries which would otherwise have had to return empty to Sakulevo. As a caustic English officer said, "In our Army we could not have done a thing like that without correspondence with the Admiralty and the appointment of a naval transport officer."

But the speciality of the Italian organisation is their aerial railways, which they call "Telefericas." These aerial cable ways carry steel baskets which take 5 cwts., one basket each way each trip, moving at five miles an hour. The power comes from a 16 h.p. motor-engine at the higher end of the line, supported on a framework of steel, which is ballasted with stones. The cables are slung on supports of hollow steel tubing. The whole installation can be taken down and carried away in loads of quite moderate weight, and the effect of the Teleferica is to make what would otherwise be the hardest part of the transport route the easiest. Lightness and transportability are prominent characteristics of all Italian material; their tents even are less bulky though no less comfortable than ours, and the big mess tents are of a picturesque, rakish design that calls to mind the pavilion of a Roman general, just as the splendid swing with which an Italian officer throws the end of his long grey cloak across his body and back over his shoulder must be the direct descendant of a similar gesture with the toga.

Staying at the Italian headquarters mess reminded me of nothing so much as being at a Swiss winter-sports hotel. You came out of a driving snowstorm through a draught-proof wooden door into the electrically lighted marquee, warmed by one of those black Tuscany stoves called, from their shape, *porcolini*, with a tray of water on the top to prevent

## COMING OF THE RUSSIANS AND ITALIANS 187

the air from getting too dry. The cooking was most excellent ; the mess waiters had acquired their skill at the Carlton or the Savoy, and similar hotels in every capital of Europe. A thing one noticed was that hardly anybody drank even wine, while there was no sign at all of the vermouth, the whisky, the port and liqueurs without which we English should find life on campaign miserable indeed.

The Italians had a hard time during the winter in this exposed sector ; in January they evacuated 250 cases of frostbite, as many men as were sent down wounded during the same period.

The chief feature of the enemy position over against them was the precipitous height of Hill 1050. This peak on the left of their front was first captured by the 2<sup>me</sup> bis Zouaves on November 20th, under the command of General Misitch—an action for which they were awarded the distinction of the *fourragère*. When the Italians took over Hill 1050 they established an observation-post there which was of great value to them, and it was to prevent this use of the crest that the German Gardejaeger launched, on the evening of February 12th, the first flame attack they made in the Balkans. Just as darkness fell tongues of fire and dense stifling clouds of black and sooty smoke leapt suddenly from the German front line, which was close up to the Italian positions on the hill. The burning liquid ran down the steep incline of the Italian trenches, destroying everything it met with. The enemy followed up their surprise by an immediate infantry attack. The failing light made it difficult to distinguish friend from foe, and the Italians were driven from the crest of 1050, and from the trenches to the left of it, towards Piton A, losing 200 men to the destructive flames. But after occupying these trenches the Germans were held up by Italian reserves only a little way further down the



## 188 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

slope, and General Petiti, informed of the attack by telephone, immediately ordered a counter-assault, which was renewed again and again throughout that night and next day until practically all the lost trenches were taken again at a cost of 3 officers and 80 men killed and 70 wounded. On February 27th, a few days after my stay in the Italian headquarters, the Italians made an attempt to reoccupy the crest of the hill which had been, since they lost it, virtually neutral ground. The Germans, however, had used their time since the last attack in mining the summit, and though the Italians won it back, taking 69 prisoners, it was only to have a number of men blown into the air.

But although the advantage of position was so much on the side of the enemy the Italians never lost ground and still continue to hold their rockbound sector in the Cerna loop.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE BULGAR SUMMER OFFENSIVE OF 1916 AND ITS CHECK BY THE SERBS AT OSTROVO.

THE seizure of Fort Rupel I have related in a chapter on our relations with the Greeks. It effectively blocked one of our most feasible lines of advance. Admittedly the fact that we had no railway up to the Struma, but only the hilly Seres road, would have made a march on Nevrokop or Petritch a difficult operation from the point of view of supply. The use of a railway to the mouth of the Rupel Pass might indeed have been secured, as a glance at the map will show, by driving the Bulgars off their hill-positions behind Doiran town so as to get the use of the Junction—Salonica-Constantinople line, which there makes a right-angled turn to the east. The attempt to free this corner by Lake Doiran of the enemy was begun in the late summer of 1916 by the French, abandoned when the Bulgar offensive from Monastir towards Ostrovo on our western wing developed, and renewed by ourselves in April and May, 1917, when the elaborate defences and heavy artillery which the long pause had enabled the Bulgars to establish there proved too much for us.

Their descent upon Fort Rupel—a movement arranged with the connivance of the Greek Government, whose betrayal of their territory to their natural enemies had been purchased by a German loan—

## 188 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

slope, and General Petiti, informed of the attack by telephone, immediately ordered a counter-assault, which was renewed again and again throughout that night and next day until practically all the lost trenches were taken again at a cost of 3 officers and 80 men killed and 70 wounded. On February 27th, a few days after my stay in the Italian headquarters, the Italians made an attempt to reoccupy the crest of the hill which had been, since they lost it, virtually neutral ground. The Germans, however, had used their time since the last attack in mining the summit, and though the Italians won it back, taking 69 prisoners, it was only to have a number of men blown into the air.

But although the advantage of position was so much on the side of the enemy the Italians never lost ground and still continue to hold their rockbound sector in the Cerna loop.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE BULGAR SUMMER OFFENSIVE OF 1916 AND ITS CHECK BY THE SERBS AT OSTROVO.

THE seizure of Fort Rupel I have related in a chapter on our relations with the Greeks. It effectively blocked one of our most feasible lines of advance. Admittedly the fact that we had no railway up to the Struma, but only the hilly Seres road, would have made a march on Nevrokop or Petritch a difficult operation from the point of view of supply. The use of a railway to the mouth of the Rupel Pass might indeed have been secured, as a glance at the map will show, by driving the Bulgars off their hill-positions behind Doiran town so as to get the use of the Junction—Salonica-Constantinople line, which there makes a right-angled turn to the east. The attempt to free this corner by Lake Doiran of the enemy was begun in the late summer of 1916 by the French, abandoned when the Bulgar offensive from Monastir towards Ostrovo on our western wing developed, and renewed by ourselves in April and May, 1917, when the elaborate defences and heavy artillery which the long pause had enabled the Bulgars to establish there proved too much for us.

Their descent upon Fort Rupel—a movement arranged with the connivance of the Greek Government, whose betrayal of their territory to their natural enemies had been purchased by a German loan—

together with its sequel of an advance upon Kavalla, enabled the Bulgarians immensely to improve their strategical position in the Balkans, for they thus linked up their eastern and western forces between which the Greek districts of Seres and Drama had previously been a wedge. With the single inconvenience of bulk-breaking at the Demir-Hissar bridge over the Struma, which the French had blown up in January, 1916, train communication was made possible from Doiran to Okjilar, in the part of Bulgaria that comes down to the Ægean. When we moved up to our positions on the Krusha-Balkan mountains and the Struma river our guns came close enough to this railway to stop the use of it for through lateral communication, though in the thick of the fighting which resulted in the taking of Yenikeuy on the Struma in October a Bulgarian train loaded with ammunition deliberately steamed along in full view, dumping its cargo at different places, and got safely away again, though one or two of our shells seemed to go right through it.

But the principal advantage to the Bulgars by their occupation of Greek territory between the Struma and the frontier was that it made it possible for them to bring reinforcements and supplies from Eastern Bulgaria or even from Turkey all the way by train with the greatest convenience; the railway on the east of Seres was too far away from our lines for us to interfere with this use of it.

Later on, in August, when the Bulgarian plans for a general offensive against us were mature, and simultaneously with their attack upon our left wing which led to the battle of Ostrovo, they advanced further southwards from Rupel to the Struma, pushing before them the French forces that were beyond the river. Some confused fighting took place during the whole of one day, and a column of British yeomanry

was sent out, which carried on a rearguard action while the French were getting back over the Orliak bridge, the only line of retreat open to them. This retirement had been foreseen as inevitable, should these circumstances arise, owing to the weakness of our force compared to the enemy. The object of going beyond the Struma had only been to hold bridgeheads, not to occupy territory permanently.

But events on the Struma were of small importance in comparison with the Bulgarian offensive in force upon the other wing of the Allied front, the brunt of which fell upon the Serbians, who had lately taken up position there, and who were at first pressed back as far as Lake Ostrovo.

As I have said elsewhere, when the construction of the entrenched camp was finished General Sarrail began to move his forces up to the Greek frontier, on the other side of which the Bulgars were. His twofold object in entrenching himself there was to stall off a possible enemy advance on Salonica at as great a distance as possible from the entrenched camp, and also to hold the enemy along the whole line while gradually and as secretly as possible concentrating troops at one point to make there a sudden offensive movement of his own.

The point he had chosen for this attack was the valley of the Vardar. It was chosen because the railway ran up the course of the river, and a modern army must have a railway behind it if it is to fight its way any distance.

To co-operate with this plan the British Army in Macedonia thinned out its line on the Struma (though faced with the risk of a reinforced enemy attack from the Bulgarian division concentrated at Xanthe, and other columns advancing from the north), and massed two divisions south of Doiran, while holding two others ready to move there also, if necessary, to give

## 142 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

backing to the French in their thrust up the Vardar valley. This attack up the river would probably have been followed by a push for Monastir; but Sarrail's plan was for the Vardar operation to be carried out first, both to draw Bulgar forces to that sector and to make it appear that the arrival there of British troops was to reinforce, and not replace, the French.

For this Vardar attack the manifold preparations necessary were meanwhile being made. When you want to go anywhere with wheeled traffic in the Balkans you have first of all to build a road in the direction you have chosen. This General Sarrail had done. He had furthermore gathered his heavy artillery, worked out a scheme of transport, arranged the supply of food and ammunition, and made all the various dispositions required to put an army into action on a certain front.

But our schemes in the Balkans have never been more than a small part of the vast operations of war going on all round Europe, and they have consequently always been controlled and conditioned by considerations arising in connection with other theatres of war. It is the function of the Allied War Council, which alone has the means of seeing the military situation as a whole, to co-ordinate movements in all these different zones of operations, to check action, although it may appear locally desirable in one place, to order an offensive in spite of its seeming doomed to failure in another—all for reasons arising out of strategical considerations of the widest nature.

On such legitimate grounds as these, no doubt, the prepared offensive of the Allies in the Balkans was delayed by successive orders, though meanwhile the local tactical situation and the need of holding enemy forces there obliged General Sarrail to make a limited attack with French troops at Doiran which succeeded,

under cover of the Anglo-French artillery, in taking Tortoise Hill and the village of Doldzeli, while the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry co-operated by taking Horseshoe Hill.

It was reasons of high strategy and politics which led to the postponement of General Sarrail's attack. To have brought the Roumanian Government to sign a convention of alliance was a diplomatic triumph for the Allies, but there yet remained a period of ten doubtful days between the signature of that convention and its ratification by a formal declaration of war upon Austria and Bulgaria. During those ten days Roumania might still have changed her mind, and it is now no more than a matter of history how both the Central Powers and ourselves vied in bluffing against each other (it is not the exact word in our case, but none conveys the impression so exactly) during that critical period while the adhesion of our new Ally yet hung suspended in the balance.

In the Balkans the pressure which the Allies brought to bear to reassure the Roumanians took the form of ordering that the push forward up the Vardar valley should begin. If this attack met with success in the first week's fighting, the encouragement to Roumania to clinch her entry into our alliance would be considerable. The victorious advance of the French from the south would be an incentive to Roumanians to repeat, even though under more difficult conditions, their own march upon Sofia of 1913.

But Bulgaria's bluff forestalled ours. It was her object to cow the Roumanians into continuing their neutrality by putting before their eyes the spectacle of a successful Bulgarian offensive in Macedonia. German agents—who swarmed at Bucharest, which always reminded one of a German *Residenz-Stadt* rather than of the capital of an independent race—



## 144 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

together with the Press of the Central Powers, vehemently announced that the moment had at last arrived when the Allies would be driven, not only back to Salonica, but into the sea. Owing to the delays of the Allied Governments the initiative in the Balkans had indeed passed to the enemy.

All the disposition of the French, then, had to be recast, and owing chiefly to the lack of bridges over the Vardar it took a fortnight to get their guns from the Vardar-Doiran front out to the support of the Serbs, who needed them so badly. The latter, taken by surprise owing to the connivance in the Bulgarian advance by the Greek troops on the frontier, were driven from ridge to ridge until they had their backs to Lake Ostrovo. There they held their ground until the French were able to get into position on their left flank. When that had been accomplished a counter-offensive was started that gradually, with many delays and checks, carried the Allies back over all the ground they had lost and eventually into Monastir itself.

The line which the Bulgars had held from the time they captured Monastir in November, 1915, until this attack of theirs in August, 1916, lay along the Serbo-Greek frontier. The sector on which they now advanced was limited by the commanding height of Kaimakchalan in the east and by Lake Prespa in the west.

The Serbs were separated from the Bulgarians by a fringe of Greek frontier guards. During the night of August 17th those frontier guards unobtrusively withdrew, leaving the way clear for the Bulgars to press on and attack the handful of scattered Serbs at Florina with all the advantage of surprise.

The Bulgar advance began at 2 a.m. Two columns, each of one regiment of infantry, with several guns, marched southwards across the Greek frontier, one



[Official Photograph.]

MULES AND MOUNTAINS THE COMMONEST  
FEATURES OF A JALPAN LANDSCAPE.



## THE BULGAR SUMMER OFFENSIVE 145

through Negocani, the other through Sakulevo and Vrbeni. The concentration and the preparations made for these columns to move had been carried out secretly, and they came by little-used hill-tracks.

The feeble Serbian outposts to the north of Florina could do nothing but retire before the overwhelmingly superior strength of the Bulgars, though they offered what resistance was possible, and when, at 10.15 a.m., the Bulgars with 100 German pioneers occupied Florina station, which is three miles from the town, they had not made this progress without loss.

But the advance of the enemy had already cut off all the other Serbian irregulars to the west of Florina, and they were only able to get back to the main body of their army, after losing 120 killed and wounded, by making a great detour through the mountains southwards, travelling only by night over unknown paths.

On August 18th, in the early morning of the day following their first move across the frontier, the Bulgars attacked the Serbs with about 12,000 men. The Serbs could only gather half that number to oppose them. The fight took place along a line from Boresnica through Vostaran to the Ceganska Planina heights, and as a result of it the Danube division fell back into Leskovec, Vrtolom and Rosna, all of them villages south of the Monastir road.

On August 19th there was a hotly contested fight round Banitza, where the road from Monastir branches off, one arm to Salonica, the other southwards to Sorovitch. At 6 p.m. a mass attack by six battalions of Bulgarian infantry took Hill 726 beside the town and the Serbian troops holding Hill 950 further to the south were forced back to the east of Cerovo. The retreat was made in good order, and the next Serbian line of defence ran from the northern end of

## 146 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Lake Petrsko along the Malkanidje range of hills to the Ceganska Planina.

The following day, August 20th, was the most critical of all. The fighting was being carried on in great heat on these stony hills where it was absolutely impossible to dig, and where the only shelter to be obtained consisted of a heaped parapet of stones which, if a shell struck it, was an added danger rather than a protection. The Serbs suffered much from lack of water. Fortunately the Vardar division, which had been away back in reserve, was beginning to arrive by now, but for all that the Serbian centre was forced off the Malkanidje ridge on to the hills which form the very bank of Lake Ostrovo. And now the situation became really serious. Losing ground west of Lake Ostrovo did not matter much, but if the Serbs were forced to abandon this last ridge before the lake there would have been no way of retreat for them except around the northern end, and that would have left it open for the enemy to advance round the other and cut the railway to Salonica between Agostos and Vodena, so putting themselves astride the Serbian line of supply. The 17th Regiment of the Drina division was sent to reinforce the Danube division at the threatened point, while the rest of the Drina on the Serbian right wing further to the north attacked and took the lower spurs of the steep mountain Kaimakchalan.

The success of the Bulgarian offensive had reached high tide, however. Their soldiers were boasting exultantly, as we heard later from the peasants of the villages they occupied, that they would be in Salonica in a week. The rapidity with which they had crumpled up our left wing and the advantages which they enjoyed, thanks to the complicity of the Greek authorities and the native inhabitants of Bulgarian race of the region they were fighting in,

doubtless encouraged confidence. Their columns were guided in their advance by Greek gendarmes in uniform, and their cavalry patrols even succeeded in getting round to the eastern side of Lake Ostrovo.

But the capture of Pateli, which reduced the Serbian hold on the western bank of Lake Ostrovo to one-half of the length of its shore, was the last success that the Bulgarian invasion registered. After that they seemed exhausted, as, indeed, they might well be, at the end of a whole week of such marching and fighting as they had had. And meanwhile the Serbs were growing daily stronger. A brigade of the Timok division, which was in general reserve down at Voden, arrived; the irregulars, the best fighters in the Serbian Army, suddenly appeared on the left wing after their precarious retreat from Florina; the first detachments of French and Russian reinforcements were getting into line at the southern end of Lake Ostrovo.

On August 22nd five separate Bulgar assaults on the ridge west of Lake Ostrovo were beaten back by counter-attacks. The losses of the enemy were estimated at five times those of the Serbs.

This was the climax of the battle of Ostrovo, and its further development, and ensuing conversion into a successful Allied advance, is told in the chapter on the push for Monastir.



## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PUSH FOR MONASTIR, WITH BRITISH CO-OPERATION.

WHEN the Allied Forces first left the entrenched camp and marched up towards the Greek frontier to make a new line there, French troops originally moved in all three of the principal directions, towards Seres, Kilkish and Monastir. The result was that the British on the Seres road and in the Kilkish area found themselves interspersed with French. General Sarrail's aim in this arrangement was that he wished French troops to be available to take part in any action that might occur, and it could not be certain where fighting would begin. But General Milne and his Chief of Staff (General Milne having succeeded to the command from General Sir Bryan Mahon in May) saw in this mingling of Allied forces a danger of confusion. The different supply systems would conflict on the limited routes available, and the lines of communication of the French and British Armies, instead of being separate and distinct, would intersect each other. So, with a view to securing administrative efficiency, General Milne asked General Sarrail that the English might be accorded an independent and homogeneous sector of the Allied Balkan line; and General Sarrail agreed to this at once.

The reshuffling of divisions thus rendered necessary led to a good deal of marching and counter-marching



## 150 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

that seemed futile and aimless to the troops who had to do it, but which simplified considerably the organisation of the British force.

Before the change was made one of our divisions had been since April 18th at Kilkish, with a French division on its left and two French divisions carrying on the line to its right. Our division's front was from Hirsova to Dereselo, a trench-line of about 10,000 yards. We had no exact junction with the French, but they said that in case of a Bulgar advance down the plain towards Kilkish they could stop the enemy with their 75's alone. For the function of our division was that of the stopper in the neck of what was known by the French as the *trouée de Kukus*. The idea was that on either side the French were pushed forward and held hill positions that formed salients, while, 'in between, was the inviting flat plain of Kilkish, down which the enemy, if he felt like an offensive, might come, only to run into our 22nd Division, behind its wire, at the head of the gap, while the French shot at him from either side.

But the Bulgar was not to be tempted. In fact, his whole campaign has been a defensive one, conducted, thanks to his German masters, and their undivided authority, with unvarying skill. The Bulgar has got nearly all he really expected out of the war, and he is content to sit tight on it. He is a stubborn fellow, too, in defence of his possessions.

The *chassé-croisé* of our divisions with the French was over by the time the Bulgar offensive against the Serbs, which culminated in the battle of Ostrovo, began. It was ending, indeed, when the Serbians first began to move out of Salonica at the end of June.

The holding up of the Bulgar offensive on the Allied left wing at the battle of Ostrovo (related in Chapter X.) was followed by a lull which lasted until the middle of September. The Bulgars did not retire ;

they and the Serbs sat and looked at each other from behind their stone parapets, which ran about the hillsides, where it was too rocky to dig trenches, in a way that resembled those loose stone walls which divide the fields in North Wales. I say "looking at each other" advisedly, for the Serbs, at any rate, were extraordinarily casual in the way they exposed themselves. "Just stand up here," a Serbian officer would say with the whole of his head above the parapet, when you visited their front line trenches. "You see that line of grey stones about 100 yards down the hill? That's their front line. Now just watch the edge of that and you'll see their heads show now and then. There! See that one?" One always professed to detect a head very quickly, this entertainment being trying for the nerves; but I have often noticed that the Germans have not taught the Bulgarians to be anything like as good at sniping as they are themselves.

From July 20th, however, the British force began to settle down into position, from the Vardar in the centre of the Allied line round by Lake Doiran and the Struma to the sea—a front of ninety miles.

The French, at this period of midsummer, 1916, had no actual sector. Some of their troops were getting into position on the left flank of the Serbians to begin the push backwards towards Monastir, and they had two divisions, in Army reserve, available for reinforcing any part of the front. While we were still in process of relieving the French we co-operated with them in seizing some hill-positions in the corner by Lake Doiran, which carried the Allied line forward to the foot of those heights of the "Pip Ridge," Grand Couronné and Petit Couronné, which have since barred our further progress.

The enemy forces between the Vardar and Lake Doiran now consisted of three German infantry

## 152 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

battalions on the left bank of the river, with two others in reserve at Bogdanci, and sixteen Bulgarian battalions on the rest of the line as far as Doiran, with several others in reserve.

On August 15th the French infantry, supported both by English and French guns, occupied Tortoise Hill and the village of Doldzeli. Next day, and on the night following that, the Bulgars violently counter-attacked Doldzeli, and the village changed hands several times, finally remaining neutral ground, with the opposing forces entrenched on either edge of it. To support this French force in its new position, the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry rushed Horseshoe Hill in the night of the 17th with the bayonet. The French originally proposed to go on and attack Petit Couronné, then less formidable than it is now, all these offensive movements being intended but as the prelude to a strong French thrust up the Vardar valley, as has been related in Chapter X. But just then came the sudden Bulgar offensive southwards from Monastir, and operations of any scope in the Doiran-Vardar sector had to be called off, so that all available strength might be used to meet the danger on the left wing.

On September 11th, a couple of days before the date fixed for the start of the combined push which the French, Serbians and Russians were preparing to make from Lake Ostrovo, the British, to co-operate with this movement, began a holding attack on the Macukovo salient close to the left bank of the Vardar. This salient was very thoroughly fortified, and was, moreover, held by German troops. We began with three days' artillery bombardment by all calibres, using heavy howitzers and field-howitzers to smash the enemy trenches, field-guns to cut their wire, and 60-pounders and long 6-in. guns to silence the enemy's artillery. On the night of the 18th the infantry

attack was made. It began by officers' patrols creeping up to find the best gaps in the wire. The length of front on which we were attacking was only a mile, for our object was not to pierce, or even permanently to occupy, part of the enemy's front, but merely to seize, and, if possible, hold for a little time, the position called "Machine-gun Hill," with a view to keeping the Bulgars interested in this part of their front, and thus preventing them from sending reinforcements round to oppose the impending Franco-Serbian attack in the west. It was the first time our troops in the Balkans had made an attack of this size upon entrenched positions of the enemy, but in one hour and twenty-five minutes from the time that the order of attack was given at the place of assembly the whole of the trenches indicated were in our possession. Fifty prisoners with nine machine-guns were taken, and the Lancashire Fusiliers and Liverpool Regiment, supported by the East Lancashires and Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who had captured the position, began at once to reconstruct its defences. Not without reason, for the Bulgar infantry counter-attack, which they beat off during the night, was only a prelude to a most violent bombardment next day by every Bulgarian battery within range. The next afternoon, in consequence, to avoid further losses, and as the limited object of the attack had been fully carried out, the Brigade was withdrawn.

Meanwhile, the Franco-Serbian counter-offensive had started and met with very satisfactory success. The Serbs had in line the whole of their Third and First Armies under General Vassitch and Voivode Misitch respectively. Their Second Army remained where it had been since before the Ostrovo battle, further round on the right, facing the Bulgars among the steep, scrub-covered mountains of the Moglena. And in co-operation with the Serbs, at the northern

## 154 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

end of Lake Ostrovo, was practically the whole French force in the Balkans, with a contingent of Russians. The Serbs were also supported by French heavy artillery, having no guns of their own bigger than 120 mm.

I returned immediately after witnessing the attack on the Macukovo salient to the Serbian front. By this time, September 18th, the Franco-Serbian Army had pushed forward to within a few miles of Florina on the left wing, their new line running in a north-easterly direction from there back towards Kaimakchalan. The Serbs took back thirteen miles of lost ground in three days. The Gornichevo pass and the village of Banitza, on the main road to Monastir, had been regained, and as you drove along it you passed ample evidence that the Bulgarian retreat had been considerably hurried. Abandoned guns, to the number of nine, and thirty limbers, lay by the side of the road. The victorious Serbs had not yet had time to drag them away. All the rubbish that a hastily retreating army leaves behind was scattered right and left. Bullet-pierced caps and helmets, greatcoats, broken rifles, ammunition pouches, marked the trail of the retreating enemy, and from the top of the hill at Banitza, where the road drops steeply down to the plain, you could see the Serbian infantry spread out on the green turf, each in his little individual shelter-trench, while the enemy shrapnel burst above and among them; and beyond, right away in the distance, loomed faintly the white minarets and walls of Monastir, their goal on the threshold of Serbia, gleaming faintly through the haze, like the towers of an unreal fairy city. There was to be much fighting during the next two months in this green plain of Monastir, across which the enemy had already constructed two strong lines of defensive works before he started on his advance to Ostrovo.

And this is the moment to say how effective a contribution towards the success of the Serbian advance from Ostrovo was made by the English M.T. companies, which had been lent to the Serbian Army, the Serbs having no M.T. organisation of their own. If I remember rightly, there were at this time three Ford companies of 100 lorries each and one 3-ton lorry company attached to the Serbians. Serbian generals have frequently avowed in their Army orders how impossible it would have been for them to press so closely as they did upon the heel of the Bulgars but for the self-regardless assistance of the officers and men of these M.T. companies. The drivers threw themselves into the work of punching those little Ford vans up appalling hills like the Gornichevo pass in a truly sporting spirit. It was up to them to see that the Serbians fighting on ahead were not let down for lack of ammunition and that as many of their wounded as possible should be brought back down to railhead at Ostrovo. They worked for forty-eight hours on end without stopping, over roads crowded with troops and guns, cheerfully giving up food and sleep during the push. Some of the gradients up which they took their loads were so steep that the petrol would not flow into the carburettor, and the only way the cars could get up these parts was by a sort of waltzing movement, the weary but determined driver twisting his van sideways across the road every few yards to get another gasp of petrol, and then making on up the slope a little further, until his engine was on the point of stopping, before repeating the manoeuvre. Perhaps the worst of the many bad runs which these Ford companies undertook was the one from the side of Lake Ostrovo up to the village of Batachin on the slopes of Mt. Kaimakchalan. I made one journey up it, and though it was once my fortune to chase

an aeroplane across the Swiss Alps in a 100 h.p. racing car, climbing Kaimakchalan in a "flying bedstead" of a Ford was a sensation yet more vivid. As the car zigzagged up the hairpin ladder of the yellow road one was haunted by an incongruous memory of how

"The blessed Damsel lean'd out  
From the gold bar of Heaven."

For, indeed, one might have been on some celestial balcony. Ostrovo Lake, with its ragged fringe of trees, and the sandy flats upon its shore, lay far below, almost sheer beneath one. And looking down upon the roofs of the next convoy of cars following, they seemed more like an orderly string of ants than of vehicles as big as one's own.

There is a belt of splendid beech forest half-way up Kaimakchalan, but beyond that the bare mountain-side stretches nakedly on to its cap of almost perennial snow. Its surface is like Dartmoor drawn up at an angle to the sky, and right on the top, where the north slope drops sheer away to the Cerna valley, stand the white frontier stones that mark the boundary of Serbia. From here there is a magnificent outlook across a great confused stretch of rocky hills, which from this height appear no more important than the wrinkles on a plaster contour map.

It was on this vantage ground above the clouds, with the country they were fighting to win back laid out in full prospect before their eyes, that the Serbs fought their fiercest battles with the Bulgars. The Bulgars had such casualties that one battalion of their 46th Regiment mutinied. Little entrenching was possible on the stonebound mountain-side. In clefts and gullies, behind outcrops of rock or under shelter of individual heaps of stones collected under cover of the dark, the soldiers of these two Balkan

armies, not unakin in race, with languages closely related and histories that are a parallel story, faced and fought each other with savage and bitter hatred, under the fiercest weather conditions of cold and exposure. The wind there was sometimes so strong that the Serbs said they "almost feared that the trench-mortar projectiles would be blown back on to them."

There could be little artillery at that altitude to keep the battle lines apart. Mortar, bomb and bayonet were the weapons that worked the slaughter on Kaimakchalan, and so fiercely were they used that Serbs would reach the ambulances with broken-off pieces of knives and bayonets in their wounds. You came upon little piles of dead in every gulley; behind each clump of rocks you found them, not half-buried in mud or partly covered by the ruins of a blown-in trench or shattered dug-out, but lying like men asleep on the clean hard stones. The fish-tail of an aerial torpedo, the effect of whose explosion had been magnified by flying clouds of stony shrapnel, usually furnished evidence of the nature of their death. Not only for days but for weeks after dead Bulgars lay there, preserved in the semblance of life by the cold mountain air, looking with calm, unseeing eyes across the battleground that had once been the scene of savage and concentrated passion and activity, and then lapsed back again into its native loneliness, where the eagle is the only thing that moves. Some still held in their stiff fingers the bandage they had been putting to a wound when death took them; here was a man with a half-eaten bread-crust in his hand. On others you could see no sign of hurt. They must have been killed by the shock alone of the explosion of that aerial torpedo whose black fragments lie among them—killed, too, at night probably as they waited for the dawn

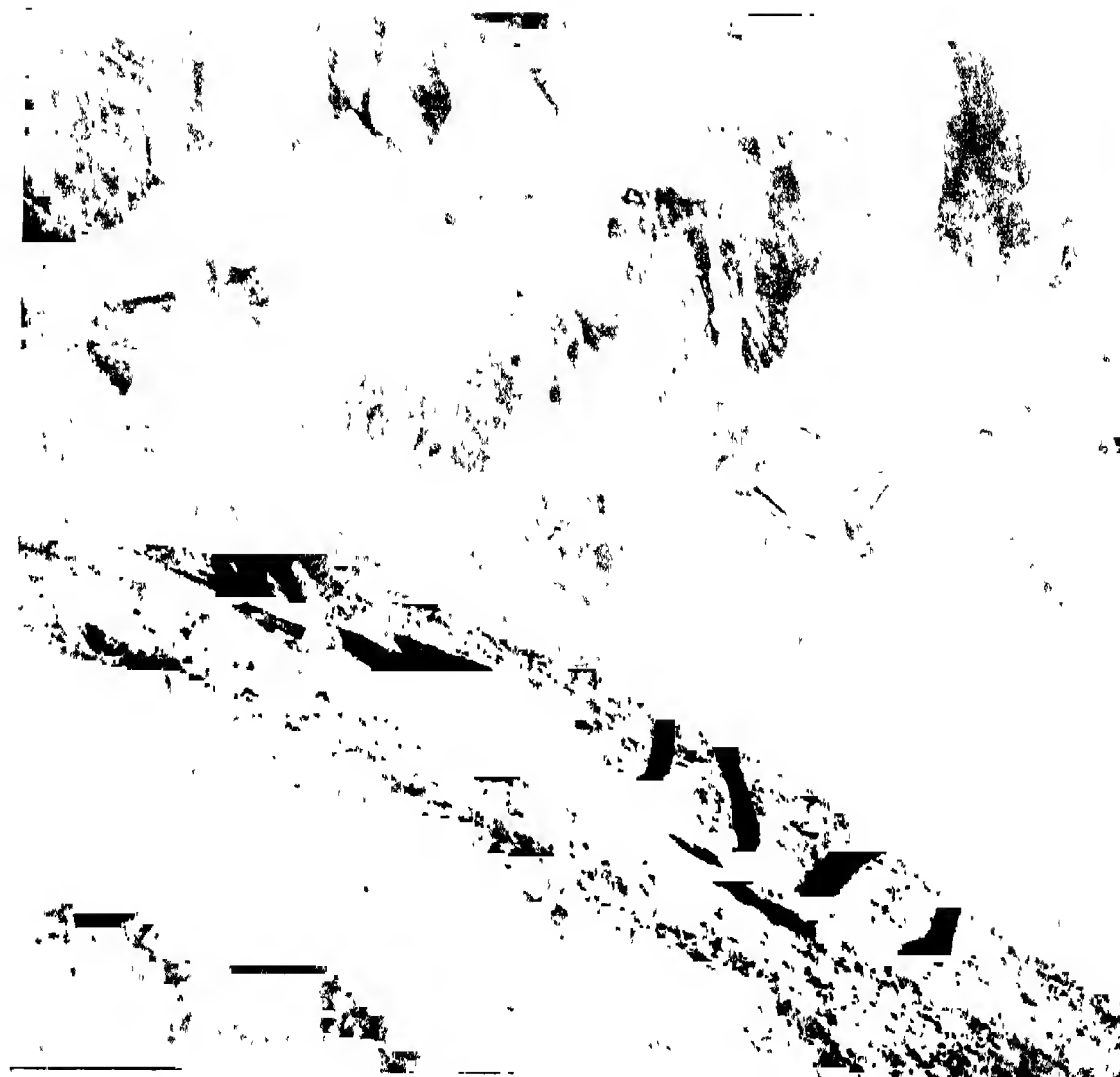


to start fighting once more. In other places you would find bodies of Serbs and Bulgars mixed together where they had met with the bayonet. Yet on none of the dead faces that you looked into did you see the trace of an expression of anger or fear. They slept dispassionately, calmly, as if finding in death the rest and release from suffering that war had so sternly denied them.

Meanwhile, in the broad corridor of flat green turf that leads northward from Florina to Monastir the Serbs and French fought unremittingly to drive the Bulgars further. Delay was caused to our advance by the fact that the Bulgars in their retreat blew up the railway viaduct across the gorge at Eksisu; and the need of pausing while the French wheeled round into line at Florina to conform with the right-angled change of direction necessary for the advance on Monastir allowed the enemy time to settle into his Kenali trenches which held us up for six weeks more. A preliminary Bulgar stand was made on a line that ran through Petorak, Vrbeni and Krusograd.

It was open fighting in the fullest sense of the word. From the crest of one of the rolling ridges of grass you could watch the movement of every individual infantry soldier from the time he got up at the foot of your hill, through all his two-mile advance in skirmishing order across the bare plain, until he reached the enemy wire, which was clear to see with glasses in front of the black copses of trees that surround the villages of Petorak and Vrbeni.

Once during that fighting, on September 19th, I saw a Bulgarian attempt at a cavalry charge. It was only an affair of two squadrons and it was swept away by machine-guns, the body of the young captain who led it being found afterwards on the ground. But cavalry charges are rare now; and an open flat country like this plain of Monastir, where you could



*[Official Photograph]*

THE STEEP TRACKS UP WHICH ALL AMMUNITION,  
SUPPLIES AND WATER HAVE TO BE CARRIED  
TO MUCH OF OUR FRONT LINE.



gallop till your horse dropped dead without meeting any obstacle more formidable than a drainage-ditch, was a rare setting for one. The Serbian infantry were scattered in the open, not in a continuous trench-line, but in those little *trous individuels*, like the beginnings of a grave, which each man digs for himself. The Bulgar guns were shelling them with shrapnel in a half-hearted way. It seemed a slack sort of battle-day. Then one noticed an indistinct little black blob moving about on the edge of Vrbeni wood four miles away. The glasses revealed it as horsemen, formed in two separate bodies. Could it be that they were going to charge? Evidently, for they began to move towards us, keeping their close formation for a little, then opening out on to a wider front. They trotted on a little distance in this way, with shells beginning to drop in their direction from batteries which had noticed the unusual phenomenon. The trot broke into a canter and then the two squadrons suddenly strung out into another formation, a long diagonal line, and lengthened into a gallop. It was a gallant sight, and when the Serbian machine-guns began a rattling fire that eventually stopped the charge, one's sympathy seemed drawn somehow to the horsemen. For one thing a mounted man coming down is much more dramatic a sight than a foot-soldier falling. Horse and man, if it is the horse that is hit, go sprawling and rolling over, or if the man is shot and falls from the saddle, the horse either comes galloping on riderless or else rushes wildly away on his own; whereas when you watch an infantry advance you cannot tell which men are dropping because they are hit and which are only taking cover or lying down to get breath. Those Bulgar horsemen never got up to the Serbian infantry. As soon as they were within a thousand yards the leading files of the diagonal lines withered away

before a hail of bullets from rifles and machine-guns ; they could never have seen the troops they had been sent to attack, and indeed the whole thing seemed a very futile and unpractical sort of enterprise to have undertaken at all. What was left of the two squadrons frayed out into a line that became more and more ragged till it just broke off, and the survivors, wheeling round, galloped back for Vrbeni wood again.

The right use for cavalry in modern war was shown a little later when the Serbs forced the passage of the Cerna river. That was part of this same battle for Monastir, but occurred when we had got a little further forward and the Serbs were pushing on to the right of the town so as to threaten the enemy line of communications and force him to abandon the place.

The continuous trench-line which the Bulgars had built across the plain of Monastir ran in front of Kenali and then mounted a conspicuous sandstone bluff forming the left bank of the Sakulevo river, the line of which it followed till it reached the Cerna at Brod. East of Brod the Cerna, hitherto open on one bank to the flat plain of Monastir, enters a valley between rocky mountains as it begins to turn north again. On the corner which the Starkovgrob heights make on the southern bank of the river, like a high bastion looking out over the Monastir plain to the west and across into the welter of stony hills beyond the Cerna to the north, the commander of the Serbian Morava division had fixed his battle observation-post. There you could stand among pinnacles of rock and watch every move of the fight across the valley. Alongside you, concealed by the crags, French field-guns pounded the stony heights that rose like an unbroken wall beyond the river, where, dotted about among the huge boulders, you could see the Serbian infantry clambering upwards to the assault. To make their horizon-blue coats more

distinguishable against the slate-coloured rock so that the French gunners and their own should not drop shells among them, every man had a square of white calico fastened to his back and the leader of each section carried a little flag, so that the steep slopes opposite were dotted with moving points of white.

Brod, the village on the river bank, was burning and had been abandoned by the enemy. Veliselo, the squalid little hamlet above it, hiding in a pocket of the mountains, was the Serbians' next objective. And suddenly, as we watched the Serb infantry climb upward among the rocks with their screen of friendly shells creeping on ahead of them, a number of little black figures sprang into sight on the hillside above and went racing off among the rocks towards Veliselo. It was the Bulgars in retreat. And soon Veliselo itself, whose thatched mud huts were plainly to be seen, began to show signs of panic-stricken activity. A string of Bulgarian carts started pouring out of the further end. With your glasses you could see stragglers running into the village, dodging about among the houses and then out along the track beyond, on the trail of the retreating column. The Bulgars were in full flight for their next prepared position among the mountains behind. To cut off as many as possible before they got to the protection of the new line the commander of the Morava division ordered up the Serbian cavalry. They appeared from behind us down in the plain below on our left—a long column trotting and cantering alternately in a dry stream-bed. While they followed that the Bulgar and German gunners on the rocky slopes beyond the Cerna could not see them, but soon they had to leave it and strike for the river bank across the open. •It was a splendid spectacle—a half-mile column of horsemen cantering over the grass. Shells

began to fall about them, now on this side, now on that. One or two men fell, hit by flying fragments, but the rest swept on and crossed the Cerna with a mighty splashing. Brod, the village on the other side, was already on fire and a bombardment of it was begun by the enemy to hinder the Serbian cavalry from passing, but they formed up under the cover of the river bank and then squadrons began to set off on individual adventures after the flying Bulgars. One of them captured a whole enemy battery, limbers, gun-teams and all.

While the Serbians were thus fighting with gradual success upon the right of the Monastir sector the French made one or two frontal attacks upon the Kenali trenches in the flat plain, and the Russians had some rough fighting among the mountains that stretch westwards to Lake Prespa. These attacks, of which the chief was that of October 14th, were not successful, for the Kenali lines were made with all the skill and thoroughness of positions on the Western front, while we had nothing like the same weight or quantity of artillery at our disposal to smash them. So that when the Serbs carried Kaimakchalan and began to get on in the loop of the Cerna river on one flank of the Kenali lines, in such a way that if they won much more ground they would succeed in turning the defences of Monastir, General Sarrail withdrew troops, both French and Russian, from his left wing to strengthen his right, and put these French reinforcements under the orders of Marshal Misitch, commanding the Serbian First Army, who proved worthy of his confidence. The tactics which led finally to the recapture of Monastir were, in fact, manœuvring and pressure along the whole of this sector, combined with a definite attempt to pierce the enemy front at one point, this effort being made by the Serbs, to whose persistence under most severe

fighting conditions the credit for the winning back of their own city belongs.

While our Allies on the left were engaged in this heavy fighting, the British Army on the Struma undertook an attack upon some fortified villages on the other side of the river. The main object of this was to hold the Bulgars in front of us and keep them from sending troops round to the Monastir sector to strengthen the resistance to our Allies there.

When you have journeyed about forty miles up and down the hills of the winding Seres road you come to the crest of the last ridge and find yourself looking across the broad green Struma valley, on the far side of which, fifteen miles away, the white houses of Seres shine out from among black trees at the foot of the opposing hills.

Further to the left, also under the slope of the ridge opposite, is Demir Hissar, and there, where the river comes down from the north into the plain, is the only break in the heights that close the view before you ; that break is the pass of Rupel, where stands the now famous fort. To the west again of this rises the black wall of the Belashitza mountains, capped with snow far on into the spring.

The plain of the Struma at your feet looks from this height flat as a billiard table, but is by no means so level, for its surface is scored with little nullahs, dried-up stream-beds, and sunken roads, that make it quite difficult to find your way about when you get down there. You can often see only a few yards on either side of you ; every track looks alike ; every tree is the twin model of every other. The villages scattered about the plain are recognisable enough from up here, but down there, if you have lost your bearings a little and approach one of them at close quarters, there is nothing in its single-storied, tumble-down, dingy-white plaster cottages to distinguish it



from half-a-dozen others, and moreover they are all so straggling that troops told off to occupy a village were often hard put to it to tell where it ended and the next one began.

The Struma river, here gleaming like a silver band across the grass, there hidden by black clumps of trees, is the explanation both of why this is one of the most fertile stretches of ground, yard for yard, in Europe, and why it is also one of the most dangerous malarial belts in the world. The best cigarettes you can buy in Piccadilly are probably made of tobacco grown on the fields through which we have since cut our trenches. That is one of the reasons why they are now so dear. Before the Bulgars moved down and we moved up to the Struma the Seres road would be dotted with strings of donkeys laden with bales of pale gold tobacco leaf coming down to Salonica for shipment. A fair but unhealthy region, which I will describe more fully later on.

What we were setting out to do beyond the Struma was to expand the small existing bridgehead beyond Orliak bridge into a big crescent of new trenches, including within its limits several villages which we now prepared to capture. The two which were gained on September 30th are called Karadjakeui-bala and Karadjakeui-zir.

During the previous night two brigades of one division and the 29th Brigade of the 10th Division crossed the Struma below Orliak bridge, and by 8 a.m. the Gloucesters and Cameron Highlanders had taken Bala, meeting with little opposition.

Zir, the next objective, was only a mile away across the open, and at 10.20 a.m. the Argylls and the Royal Scots were about to push on against it, when from the village of Yenikeuy, next to the west, the head of a Bulgar counter-attack appeared. It was made by one regiment, but it got a very little

way. The heavy guns of another division whose artillery was co-operating smashed it up at once; the Bulgars could be seen falling fast, and the rest soon turned back and were lost to sight.

The unusual feature of this fighting on the Struma was the remarkably good artillery observation you could get. From the artillery command post on one of the foothills at the edge of the plain one saw everything. Our men and the enemy were equally visible, and the work of the British artillery was even better than usual in consequence.

The attack on Zir was delayed for a time by an enemy trench which enfiladed our troops as they advanced, and it was decided to renew the attempt at four, beginning with an intense bombardment of the village.

Never did a battle look more like a chess game than from this hill. The Corps Commander and his staff were standing there among the scrub. A deal table behind them was covered with maps.

On another hillock the artillery general had his command post. New white telegraph poles brought a criss-cross of wires to it; a battery of telescopes of all calibres were directed to different points of the valley below. At the telephone a gunner staff-officer was ringing up different batteries all the time. "Is that the adjutant? What reports have you about ammunition? What's the bearing of that gun?—5730 magnetic, did you say? What's that? Enemy convoy proceeding along road to Hristian Camilla? Right. Tell one-four-three to get on to it."

A moment later he would be talking to the 6-in. howitzers, squat guns with caterpillar wheels, lurking in depressions of the ground at the foot of the hill, and looking, under their roofs of anti-aerial observation fish-netting, like some strange and gigantic fowl in a pen. "Are you there? You are to stop firing

## 166 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

now until four o'clock. At four you are to start shelling Zir one round a minute. Then at 4.10 whack in all you can everywhere round about inside the village. Now what time have you got? The infantry are going to try to rush the village at 4.15. Not a round is to be fired after that time. It's now 15.48. Pass that round to the batteries." And a few minutes later—"I want to synchronise your watch again. It's 3.56—three-five, four-oh; four-five, five-oh, five-five, 3.57."

Then an officer at another telephone would interrupt—"Oh—Esses-Beer reports enemy troops advancing from Yenikeui north-east, sir."

All glasses are converged on to Yenikeui. "I can see a few," says someone. "Yes, they're advancing from the N.E. There are some in the middle of the village, too. Lot of single men behind. Now, there's a man on a horse behind. By Jove, it isn't a man on a horse. It's a gun. Well, they're not moving. I wonder if they're dummies. They put up very clever dummies sometimes."

But the pulverising of Zir was the most pressing business on hand. The chatty arrangements one had heard made over the telephone had conjured up hell for Zir and ordered it punctually to the minute. Every calibre of gun we had, big, middling and small, concentrated on that four-hundred-yard front of village, and with each single second half a dozen fountains of parti-coloured dust and smoke sprang up along it simultaneously into the air. Grey smoke, black smoke, yellow, brown and white, elbowed and overlapped each other. Fierce red flames flashed among them, dulled by the inferno of smoke. Fleecy shrapnel bursts grouped themselves in bunches overhead. By this time not a house in the village could be seen. There was not a gap between the shell-bursts. Zir was literally hidden

behind a dense curtain; until at last the very smoke itself was hidden by more smoke, the outlines of individual shell-bursts being engulfed and swallowed up by a formless fog of drifting yellow fumes. Then, in the same manner as the bombardment had begun, it stopped, as suddenly as you turn off water at a tap. Three hundred and thirty 6-in. shells had fallen into the village in the last five minutes. Then Zir slowly emerged again, but smashed and battered into a shape that its oldest inhabitant would not have recognised, with sluggish drifts and wisps of lazy smoke crawling through its narrow streets.

It was next the turn of the twin village of Bala, which we had newly won, to endure temporary smoke-eclipse, for the Bulgars, expecting our attack, put up a violent curtain fire. The two villages were linked by a mile-long bar of brown smoke and dust. Through this at 5 o'clock the Royal Scots and the Argyll and Sutherlands pushed on, as fast as man could move, carrying two days' rations, pack, rifle, 220 rounds of ammunition, and pick or shovel. They were still enfiladed by machine-guns, but found the Bulgars in poor trenches on the outskirts of Zir. The enemy stood their ground till our men were close upon them, then threw down their arms, and Zir was ours. Just after dark, however, a Bulgar counter-attack was launched, and the black plain sprang into a vivid illumination of coloured glares and "Very" lights. Another attack broke loose at 1.15 a.m. It was a pitch-black night with a sickle moon just peeping over the hills. For five minutes nothing but small arms were at work. Then one solitary green ball of fire shot up and drooped slowly down again. Immediately the waiting Bulgar guns opened, and the whole darkness round Zir was torn by flashes of bursting shells. The flare of the discharges flickered across the sky like summer lightning. From the

## 170 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

it had been intended to create was now complete, and the Bulgars withdrew the greater part of their force to behind the railway, though they left a strong garrison in Bairakli Djuma.

They were indeed thoroughly discouraged. Their 7th Division had lost a third of its fighting strength. The 10th Division brought up from Xanthe had also suffered heavily. Our burying parties dealt with 1,500 Bulgar corpses. At a moderate estimate their losses must have been 5,000. Three hundred and seventy-five prisoners and three machine-guns were taken.

We could see Bulgar columns marching off towards Rupel and it almost looked for a while as if they might be going to abandon the Struma valley altogether.

A still larger operation on the Struma was carried out on October 31st, in the sense that we had more troops engaged than at any one time before in the Balkans. Attacks were made at about half-a-dozen points along the fifty-mile-long Struma front. Some of these were only intended as demonstrations, the main objective being the strongly fortified village of Bairakli Djuma, which stands on the way to the entrance to Rupel pass. Three new bridges had been built across the Struma for this attack, and on the night of the 26th the villages of Elisan, Ormanli, and Haznatar were seized without opposition as a taking-off area. The attack on Bairakli Djuma was then ordered and carried out on the morning of October 30th-31st with small loss, thanks to a daring deployment of three battalions on the west of the village which, though exposed to attack from the flank, was entirely successful. The scheme was that three battalions should deploy and attack the village from the west, while one company with three Vickers guns demonstrated and held the enemy to the ground on

the south, the remaining three companies being held in brigade reserve at Ormanli.

The plan worked well, the King's Own, East Yorkshires and K.O.Y.L.I. attacking from the west, while a company of the York and Lancasters demonstrated so successfully on the south that most of the enemy knew nothing of the flank attack until they were surrounded and their retreat cut off. The total of prisoners taken by this surprise attack was three officers and 320 other ranks, while one officer and 17 other ranks were found dead. Our troops, in taking the village, only had one killed and three wounded, though the subsequent enemy shelling brought our casualties up to five officers and 48 other ranks.



## CHAPTER XII.

### •MONASTIR RETAKEN.

As November drew on the heavy autumn rains converted the trenches in the Kenali plain into a swamp of the utmost wretchedness. There had been no progress there, but meanwhile the Danube Division, among the snow on the heights in the Cerna loop, had taken, first Polog, then Iven, and finally got up half-way the steep side of Hill 1212, one of the main positions in this confused tangle of mountains, which, however—as is the heartbreaking way of the Balkans—is dominated in turn by the next height, Hill 1378.

On November 14th an offensive was ordered along the whole line from Kenali to the Cerna. Two brigades of French infantry attacked Bukri and what was now the Kenali salient at noon. Three bayonet assaults were met by such heavy machine-gun fire that they failed ; but at 2.30 the attack was renewed and two Bulgar lines at Bukri were carried and held against two counter-attacks—all this in teeming rain, penetrating cold and the worst mud conceivable. The result was at last to force the Bulgars out of the Kenali line, which they had held for two months, and back on to the next prepared position on the Bistrica river, five miles behind, towards Monastir. Twenty-four pieces of artillery were taken from the enemy in three days.

The Serbs made prisoners in this fighting no less



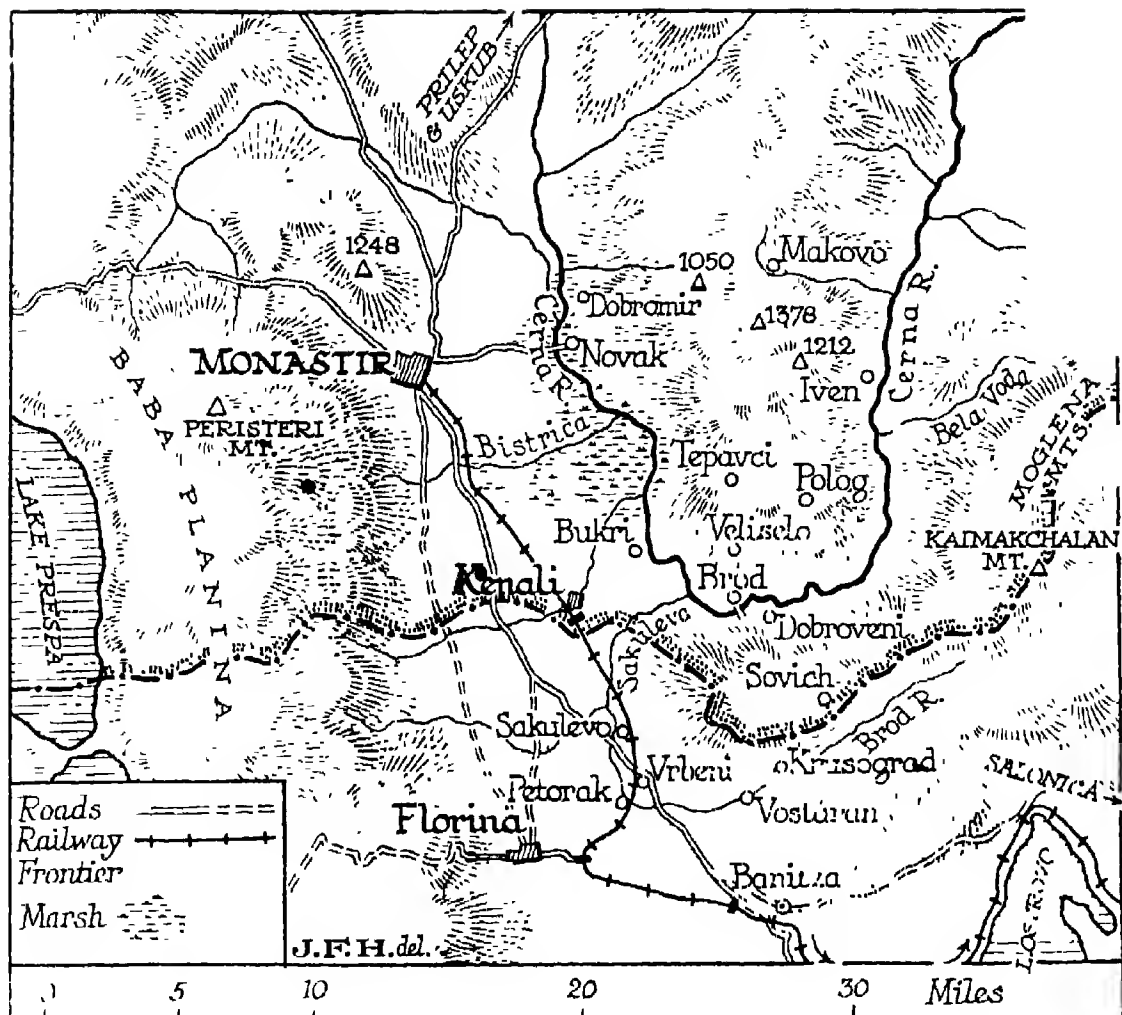
## 174 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

than twenty-eight German officers and 1,100 other ranks—a big haul for the Balkans, where the Germans are used only as stiffening for especially threatened positions. These captives cursed the Bulgars freely, saying that they had bolted and let them down.

On November 17th the Serbs carried both Hill 1212 and Hill 1378 beyond. On that, two days later, without further pressure, the Bulgars suddenly left the Bistrica line and abandoned Monastir itself, falling back down the road to Prilep.

Like many things long and earnestly awaited, the evacuation of Monastir finally came as something of a surprise. It seemed when the winter rains and snow began as if we should hardly get there before the spring. Even the night before the city was actually evacuated, when I was riding back to Vrbeni from a visit to the Serbian sector of the front with some English Staff officers, and we saw an enemy column marching out of Opticar village on the Bistrica, while earlier in the afternoon we had also noticed a string of wagons crossing the Novak bridge to the other side of the Cerna, it only seemed as if the Bulgars were moving troops from their centre to reinforce their hard-pressed left. I slept that night in a shell-riddled house in Vrbeni, which I had shared with some French officers who had moved on since the Kenali lines had fallen. It was a dingy, rickety place, its shattered windows carefully patched with sheets of German maps and a pencilled screed on one of the doors to say that it was “reserved for three Staff officers of the map-making section of the Staff of General Mackensen’s Army.”

Next morning, wading out into the river of fluid mud which served as the main street of Vrbeni, I met a Serbian cavalry officer on horseback, clearly in a mood of some excitement, who waved his hand and shouted: “*De bonnes nouvelles! De bonnes*



NE OF THE STRUGGLE FOR  
MONASTIR, ALBANIA, 1919. MON-  
ASTIR AND TOP OF THE CERNA.



*nouvelles !* Monastir is taken ; the town is in flames ! ”

It was not the first time that people had assured me with equal emotion of the capture of Monastir, but though one still felt doubtful it was the least one could do to go and see. So the mud-caked Ford car was turned out with all speed, and I started along the well-known and terribly bad road that led towards Monastir—twelve or thirteen miles ahead.

As usual, the road was crowded with every sort of transport, from creaking, solid-wheeled, bullock-drawn ox-carts that the supply service of Charlemagne's army might have used, to three-ton motor lorries, skidding and splashing through the mud. On either side were spread camps and bivouacs and dumps and depots of every kind ; heaps of carcasses of meat, mounds of petrol tins, piles of long black cylinders of gas for the observation balloon, timber, tin, wire, carefully scattered supplies of ammunition.

One thing caught the eye at once as the presage of a day that would live in history. The most perfect triple rainbow I ever saw hung over Monastir, spanning it in a brilliant arch of colour. One foot rested on the mountains to the west, where the Italians had been fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Russian and French troops in the plain ; the other was planted on the rocky heights beyond the Cerna, from where the Serbs, worn by much hard fighting, were looking down upon the city which their dogged determination had done most to win.

As one got nearer to what the night before had been the enemy's line on the Bistrica, the Monastir road became less and less thronged. And here the ability of the German road-engineers forced itself upon the attention by a remarkable contrast. Presumably there had been as much traffic along the road up to their front line as along that which led to ours, and

the weather had certainly been the same for both. Yet while our part of the Monastir road had a surface like rock-cake covered with mud of the consistency of porridge, directly you passed into what had been, until that morning, the German lines, you found yourself on a hard, smooth surface as good as an English road at home.

I got to Monastir at eleven. The first French and Russian troops had marched in together at nine, three-quarters of an hour after the last of the German rearguard left the town.

The enemy retreat had been skilfully arranged. At three o'clock in the morning the sentries in the new French line opposite the Bulgar trenches on the Bistrica had seen a great fire start in Monastir. It was the barracks, which the enemy had set burning. Then, a little later, the French patrols reported that the enemy front trenches had been found empty in several places. The Bistrica line was accordingly occupied along its whole length, the Russians wading the stream breast-high, and the Allied force began to feel forward to get into touch again with the retiring enemy.

By seven o'clock the advanced patrols reported that the town seemed unoccupied. They were then at a distance of two miles from it, and as Prince Murat, a young French cavalry officer and descendant of Napoleon's general, at the head of the mounted scouts of his regiment, approached the town at 8.30 a.m. he caught sight of the last German battery left to protect the retreat limbering up and making off at the trot.

At first it scarcely seemed as if there were any civilian population in Monastir, but they were only hiding in their shuttered houses, and when the French marched in many of them came out and threw flowers or hung up French and Serbian flags, which

they must have hidden somewhere all the twelve months the enemy was there. The British consulate flag—the Union Jack with an official “ difference ” in the centre—had been tucked away in a mattress all that time.

I turned into what used to be the “ Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Consulate ” in the main street of the town. In the hall, littered with broken packing-cases and other signs of hurried departure, were two placid-faced French Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, with their white-winged headgear as stiff and spotless as if they were in a peaceful French country town instead of a newly captured Macedonian city. They had come there to try and reclaim their piano, which some German officers had commandeered and carried off to their quarters at the consulate.

The nuns said they had organised a hospital at their convent, which had been under the supervision of German medical officers; seventeen dying Germans had been left behind in their charge when the army retreated the night before. “ The Germans were correct but brusque,” said one of the Sisters. “ The Bulgars were——” And she made an expressive little grimace.

Twice before, they said, the Germans and Bulgars had made all preparations for abandoning Monastir. The first occasion was on September 17th, after the retaking of Florina. That was followed, however, by the delay necessary for the slow wheeling round of the French and Russians into line with the Serbians again, facing the north, a manœuvre that had to be carried out with caution, so as to give the enemy no chance of thrusting himself into a gap between them. So the enemy took heart once more.

The second time the Bulgars had been ready to leave Monastir was on October 4th, after the capture

## 178 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

of Petorak and Vrbeni, and the thrusting back of the Bulgars to the Kenali lines.

Finally, the army's doctor in charge of the nuns' hospital had gone to Prilep on November 18th and telephoned from there at three in the afternoon that the hospital was to be evacuated and transferred to Prilep that night.

There is no doubt that the enemy was thoroughly discouraged and, for the moment, beaten. Nothing less would have caused the Bulgars to abandon Monastir, the sign and token of that dominion in Macedonia which they covet. Had the Allies disposed of fresh troops to carry on the pursuit, we might have taken Prilep too, and pushed the enemy back into the Babouna pass on the way to Uskub. All that the Bulgars left behind was a rearguard on the Prilep road, about three miles out from Monastir, to cover their retreat. But when they saw that the French, Serbs, Russians and Italians were all equally exhausted, that we had not a single fresh division with which to press upon their heels, but that the same wearied troops, their effectives often reduced by three-fifths, who had been fighting for six weeks in the mud before Monastir, were now hurried straight through the town and thrown into action again beyond it against the enemy rearguard, they took heart and began to hold on in greater force to the semi-circle of hills which dominates Monastir from the north. They had conceived the idea of keeping the town within shell-range and making it as far as possible uninhabitable for their foes.

This they have been able to do with effect. For a few weeks after its recapture Monastir was thronged with troops, supply depots and the headquarters of various Allied contingents. But the daily shelling of the congested streets made it more and more unsuitable for all these purposes, and now, though the

French still hold all the ground they occupied beyond the town to the north on November 19th, 1916, the place itself is deserted, the only population left being the poorer class of Greeks and Serbians, who live huddled in their cellars and would have starved but for the rations issued to them at first by the military authorities, and later by the Serbian Relief Fund. It was while superintending this work in Monastir that Mrs. Harley, a sister of Lord French, was killed by a shrapnel bullet in one of the daily bombardments.

All of us who had been on the Serbian front knew and respected profoundly the courage and energy of this gallant white-haired lady. And there are not a few other gently nurtured Englishwomen living, if not in actual danger, at any rate amid dreary, monotonous and squalid surroundings on the Serbian front, in order to bring relief to the population of that much-afflicted region. There are, for instance, the Hon. Mrs. Massey, who was wounded by a splinter from an aeroplane bomb while at her post in Sakulevo, Miss Stewart-Richardson, and several more. The Scottish Women's Hospitals are associated more especially with medical work in the field. They are attached to the Serbian Army and take in wounded in the ordinary way. The Serbians were never tired of expressing their admiration for these plucky, cheery, short-skirted girls, in their grey uniforms, who worked as nurses in the hospitals under the trees by the Ostrovo Lake and at the base at Salonica, or drove their little Ford ambulances over the worst roads without any resource to count on but their own.

Poor Monastir ! It is the only town in Macedonia for which you can feel any liking ; most picturesquely situated, looking southwards down the long green plain, and shielded to the north by the well-tilled slopes of mountains dotted with little white villages.



## 180 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Its streets, though of rough cobbles, are clean. It has a few modern buildings and the rest are a degree above that dreary, ugly squalor that makes the average Macedonian township so uninteresting. The population is mixed, of course; all Macedonia is a salad of nationalities—a fact which doubtless led some Balkan-travelled cook to invent the name *macédoine de fruits*. We consequently had some little trouble with enemy agents among the Bulgarian section of the inhabitants. Underground telephone wires were found leading to the enemy positions.

The whole population, in fact, whatever its national sympathies, had to go through the outward signs of sudden conversion when we came in, for the Bulgars had imposed the Bulgarian language and writing with severity. So all the Bulgarian shop-signs had to come down and Serbian ones go up. Czar Ferdinand must be jerked out of the place of honour on the wall and a portrait of King Peter put there instead. In the Balkans everyone has a picture of his political ruler in the house, as a kind of national emblem. At the time of the Salonica "Revolution," for instance, the boom in photographs of M. Venizelos was tremendous, while hundreds of excellent studio portraits of King Constantine could have been, and doubtless were, bought for their value as old pasteboard by some speculator in the uncertainties of future political developments.

There was one hotel in Monastir for whose plight in this respect I felt real sympathy. I went there to get quarters for my servant, and looking round for the name, saw only splashes of fresh whitewash in the places where you would have expected the sign of the hotel to be.

"What's the name of the hotel?" I asked the Greek proprietor.

He smiled uneasily. "Oh, you will find it quite

easily again," he said ; " there's the main street just there and you turn up by——"

" Yes, I know ; but what's its name ? "

" Well," said the owner, with hesitation, " it hasn't got a name yet."

However, next morning a new name went up. I found a flamboyant fresh gilt sign with the title "Hotel Européen" being hoisted into place. I then learned the eventful history of the hotel's designation. When the Serbians had won Monastir from the Turks the proprietor had suitably commemorated the event and striven to attract official favour by changing its original name to that of "Hotel de la Nouvelle Serbie." Three years afterwards to the same month the Bulgars had taken the town from the Serbs, and the establishment quickly became "Hotel de la Nouvelle Bulgarie." Now, exactly twelve months later, the Serbs had recaptured Monastir, and the "Nouvelle Bulgarie" sign had to come down with a run to avoid certain trouble. So the proprietor told me that he had now given up trying to keep in touch with these constant changes of the town's nationality. The need of continually having his sign repainted was eating into the profits of his business and delay in getting rid of the old one, or an error in tact in choosing the new might well lead to harsh suspicions of the kind that are disposed of by firing-parties at dawn. So he had decided in future to hedge. Under the sign of "Hotel Européen" he told me he felt that, for some time at any rate, he could have an easy mind. The armies of conflicting states could stream down the main street alongside, their officers could spend persecuted nights in his dubious beds, without their wrath being still further inflamed by indignation at the national sentiments expressed by the name of the hotel. And in the flush of confidence which the unexceptionable yet

## 182 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

dignified title of "Hotel Européen" inspired, I noticed, when I came to pay the bill, that the proprietor had raised his prices for rooms two francs above any other hotel in the town.

Monastir was taken on Sunday, and on Tuesday the Crown Prince of Serbia and General Sarrail went up by special train and drove round the town. On the occasion of this victory, which is indeed the principal achievement of the Salonica Expedition, General Sarrail issued a General Order to the Army, dated from Monastir, and addressing the troops of each nationality in turn. To the British he spoke in terms which showed appreciation of their especially ungrateful rôle. "Your task," said the French Commander-in-Chief, "has been most thankless. You are on a front which has hitherto been defensive, but you have not husbanded your labours or spared your efforts. You are ready to take the offensive when the order comes."

The confidence new-born in the enemy by the realisation that, though we had driven him out of Monastir, we were too weak to follow him up, was shown by the proclamations their aeroplanes let fall on the town. "People of Monastir," they said, "be of good heart. We shall not shell you or bomb you, for we are coming to retake your city."

Probably with this end in view, a whole German division had arrived as reinforcements on the Monastir front, coming from the Somme. Bulgars had also been transferred here from the Dobrudja.

The fighting around Monastir was now heavy, the French making determined attacks in the attempt to push back the enemy out of gun-fire range and the Bulgars having received orders, as prisoners told us, not to retreat a yard. They were on Snegovo Hill to the north of the town, on Hill 1248, the scene of many bitter encounters since, and on the terraced

brown slopes of snow-topped Peristeri to the west, with the Cervena-Stena ridge running down towards Monastir.

From the lower ridges of Snegovo the battle was a spectacle that lingers in the memory. Below you were the red roofs of the town, broken by the domes and minarets of two white mosques. Above these the Bulgar shrapnel burst from time to time in milk-white puffs, while the dense black smoke of the heavier shells that were intended for the French batteries sprang up all round the outskirts of the place. The French artillery, hidden by whatever feature of the ground afforded shelter, was firing as fast as the guns could be reloaded.

On the other side, higher up Mount Snegovo, you looked plainly into the French trenches on the steep hillside, and beyond them on a further slope, separated from the French by a hidden depression in the ground, were the Bulgarian positions. Once, as I watched the French infantry leap out of their trenches and run forward to the attack, an unusual thing happened. The French had passed from sight into the dip in the ground from which they would be climbing the slope beyond to reach the Bulgar line. And suddenly the trenches they were attacking were outlined by a fringe of black figures, which seemed to start out of the ground, as indeed they literally did, for the Bulgars, impatient to fire more effectively upon the attacking French and regardless of the shrapnel bursting above them, had sprung upon their parapet and stood there in full view. It was as though the bare slope had been suddenly covered with a forest of black tree-trunks.

Those Bulgar front-line trenches were taken by the French, but lost again later. The bad weather had made aeroplane reconnaissance of the enemy's positions ineffective, and the French did not know

## 184 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

what strength the Bulgars had concentrated in reserve. These reserves counter-attacked the newly gained position and retook it. Next day, however, November 28th, the French retaliated by shelling the Bulgar front line heavily for a time. The enemy withdrew his troops while the shelling lasted, but then the French sent out strong patrols to make a demonstration, which gave the Bulgars the impression that another attack was about to be made. On this, they rushed up reinforcements and manned the front line strongly again. The French patrols were then withdrawn and their heavy artillery at once opened an intense bombardment on the Bulgar trenches, which caused very heavy losses among the men who had been crowded into them.

The town of Monastir began to be an uncomfortable place to live in. The Bulgars had been forced to realise that they had no chance of taking it back by a counter-offensive, but the French, on the other hand, were not strong enough to thrust them out of artillery range. So the shelling of the city, which for all that only damaged the civilian population, began to become more regular and more intense. One quarter, which was especially exposed, was evacuated and the refugees crowded into another. There was a grave shortage of food. But it was as yet impossible to evacuate the civilian population owing to the danger of blocking up the road which was the single line of supply until the blown-up culverts and smashed points on the railway could be repaired. To be in a shelled town that is crowded with women and children is an unpleasant thing. An almost continual sound of apprehensive moaning filled the streets while a bombardment was going on, and whenever a shell with a whirr and a crash sent one of the flimsy houses flying into a cloud of dust and charred and splintered fragments

the tremulous wail would rise to a shriek of terror.

If it had not been for the Greek threat in his rear, which became more urgent after the Athens street fighting of December 1st, and led General Sarrail to concentrate troops to meet a possible Greek attack on our communications with Monastir, and particularly if we had had reinforcements to use, the next step after the taking of Monastir would have been a move on Resna to the north-west. Resna is an important depot of supplies, and one of the results of taking it would have been to hamper the enemy's communications with his forces in Albania. But the attempt to realise this scheme had to be deferred for some months more, for in addition to our own inadequate numbers and our preoccupation with the Greeks, the mud and the snow of winter now began to impose their annual immobility upon the armies in the Balkans.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE INEVITABLE WINTER LULL AND THE BEGINNINGS OF OUR SPRING OFFENSIVE.

WINTER in the Balkans is always a time of rain overhead and mud underfoot. To move anything heavy, such as a gun, the distance of a mile or two is an affair not of hours but of days, and can very often only be accomplished by enlisting supplementary assistance in the way of additional teams or motor tractors which may be in the neighbourhood on quite different business. For the men in the trenches this weather brings not a respite, but an addition of labour, the digging of the dry season being varied and increased by constant pumping and revetting of the sides of trenches with a skin of empty sandbags held in place by wire netting, in default of which the rain would simply wash the sides of the trench away. The roads, as I have said before, go all to pieces. A hole eighteen inches deep and two yards wide is a common thing to find in the centre of a main highway, despite all the patching and rolling that goes on even by night as well as day.

As a rule the weather does not get really bad in the Balkans until after Christmas, but the first three months of the year are most unpleasant, and of a nature to put all operations of any importance out of the question.

Last winter, though, 1916-1917, the Greeks occupied almost as much of the attention of the French



## 188 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

General Staff as did the Bulgars. Troops, to which the English contributed a contingent of London Territorials, were sent to occupy the five-mile "neutral zone" which it had now been agreed to mark out between the respective spheres of influence of the Venizelists and the royalists. In this zone the French had established posts to keep the peace between these mutually hostile sections of the Greek nation. The neutral zone reached the sea at Ekaterini, where our troops were stationed, being occupied with making roads and building piers.

Meanwhile, a certain amount of small trouble broke loose in the Chalcidice Peninsula, which forms the eastern side of the Gulf of Salonica, and lies in rear of our Army area. Armed reservists and other royalist agitators began to make disturbances there, which were, however, suppressed by Venizelist troops. The most interesting part of the Chalcidice Peninsula is Mount Athos, the easternmost of its three prongs, which is a sort of religious theocracy made up of Orthodox monasteries of all the nationalities that adhere to the Eastern Church. They are of great wealth, not only in the way of jewels, sacramental gold plate and vestments, but also as the possessors of valuable farms scattered all about the Ægean, which have been bequeathed to them by the pious dead. The principles of celibacy are carried so far upon this peninsula that no female animal of any sort, even a hen, is allowed to set foot there, and no male is permitted to spend more than a limited time at Mount Athos without assuming at any rate the black habit of the monk. The long hair of the monks is tucked up in a "bun" beneath their characteristic headgear, which is like a dull top hat with the brim taken off. They have a sailing ship, manned by themselves, which they send on a monthly visit to Salonica for purposes of

transacting business, and one of the oddest sights in all that city of the bizarre is to see these hybrid-looking figures with their black skirts, long hair and untrimmed beards pulling and hauling on the tackle of their schooner. Since there were Bulgarian and Greek monks as well as Russian and Serbian in Mount Athos, the peninsula had to be regularly visited by a destroyer to ensure that no illicit supplying of petrol to submarines was going on. But the monks always received our officers with ready hospitality, and were proud to show them the treasures of their ancient and religious foundations.

Another important event of the winter affecting the fate of the Salonica Expedition was the meeting of the Allied Conference in Rome, which was understood to have been convoked with the especial view of considering Balkan affairs. General Sarrail and General Milne were both summoned there, and General Sarrail was able to make a full report of his position in the Balkans in person to the Prime Ministers, War Ministers and Chiefs of the General Staffs of France, Italy and Great Britain. The results of this discussion were, however, not perceptible.

A big air raid on February 27th by fifteen large German triple-engined aeroplanes of a new type, each carrying four machine-guns, was another event of the inactive season. It caused not a few casualties which were spread among the contingents of the various Allies, and a remarkable and tragic coincidence that occurred in connection with it was that some of the British soldiers who were wounded in the first raid were taken to a General Hospital which was bombed on the following Sunday by another German raiding squadron. As a result of this, some of the wounded of the Tuesday were killed in their beds by a similar agency on the Sunday, a risk against

## 190 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

which one would say that the chances, whatever they may have been from an actuarial point of view, would under circumstances of ordinary luck be very many hundreds of thousands to one.

Nor was this General Hospital the only sufferer by German ruthlessness. The very large English hospital which the British had provided for the Serbs (6,750 hospital beds in all were furnished by the R.A.M.C. for the Serbian Army), was bombed on March 12th, in spite of being surrounded by a ring of most conspicuous red crosses, and although after a similar exploit in the previous year German aviators had dropped a message there, apologising for bombing it under the plea that they had done so by mistake. On this present occasion two nurses, several others of the staff, and a number of patients were killed.

One may take an opportunity here of referring to the remarkably efficient, energetic and persistent work in the Balkans of the British squadron of the R.F.C., which, though it did not reach Salonica until the summer of 1916, has been since then one of the most active branches of the service. Almost every day the enemy dumps and aerodromes behind the front are bombed, and only considerable preponderance both in numbers and in quality of machines has enabled the Germans to raid Salonica at all. A typical morning of one of these Salonica airmen, flying a B.E. 12, is as follows :

“Met six hostile machines. Attacked rear one—twin tractor biplane carrying four machine-guns, three firing astern and one ahead. It dropped bombs which missed. Its engines were both stopped. Attempt was made to place third drum on Lewis, but it was shot out of pilot's hand. Opened fire with Vickers, which jammed after fourth round. Hostile machine fell, turning on back when landing. Returned to repair Vickers and get more ammunition

## WINTER LULL AND SPRING OFFENSIVE 191

for Lewis. Left again and met five more double-engined machines. Attacked one. Petrol seen to be streaming out and observer hanging over side. Then attacked by four remaining machines. Having no more ammunition for Lewis, used Vickers, which jammed after second round. Returned our lines at 2,000 feet, pursued by four enemy machines."

The R.N.A.S., of whom we at Salonica saw less, as they for a long time had their base in the island of Thasos, also did a lot of successful bombing of railway bridges and burning of crops in the enemy's country. The two most striking flights of the campaign were made by Louis Noel, the French airman whom Londoners used to know well at Hendon. On July 3rd, 1916, he flew to Sofia, dropped bombs there, and got back to Salonica in five hours, and on September 22nd he returned from a flight to Bucharest and back with a passenger, 400 miles each way, over mountainous enemy country, and under stormy weather conditions.

When at last, at the end of the enforced inactivity of the winter, spring came and the mud began to dry, the Balkan Force stood at the highest point of efficiency that it had yet reached. Reinforcements and drafts had been received during the winter; many roads had been built, especially a remarkable mountain one in the loop of the Cerna, ten hilly miles long and made in twenty-two days; reserves of ammunition had been accumulated, and everything prepared for a spring offensive which should test whether, with the means then at the disposal of the Allies in the Balkans, it was possible to dislocate the Bulgar front at any point in such a way as to compel their whole line to fall back, and so win not a local tactical advantage, but a larger strategic one.

The weight of enemy effectives against us was

certainly as strong as, if not stronger than, those we could bring to bear upon him, and he had incomparably the advantage of position. In addition to this, too, the Bulgars could await our spring attack in the sure confidence that even if the Allied strength against them had developed to the point of being able to break their line so effectively as to bring an advance northwards towards the trans-Balkan railway at length within the bounds of possibility, the balance of the military situation would be quickly restored by the arrival of as many German divisions as might be necessary, for the Germans would not spare any effort to maintain the present position in the Balkans. Hitherto they have had considerable reason to be satisfied with the existing state of affairs. The Salonica Expedition is not doing them any vital harm; it is Bulgars, not Germans, who are being killed by our attacks. The presence of the Allies in the Balkans is, indeed, a guarantee that Bulgaria will not begin to wilt and cause Germany anxiety about her direct communications with Turkey and the Near East; for so long as we are pushing at the door of her own territory and of the coveted Serbian regions which she has grabbed, Germany can always use us as a bogey to scare the Bulgars into abject compliance with the will of Berlin. Moreover, the German General Staff knows that Salonica is a heavy drain upon the resources of the Allies.

Such considerations render the Germans quite content to see the present deadlock in the Balkans continue. Some of the most highly trained troops in the British Army are held up there, and nearly all the units of the Salonica Force have been together so long and have been so hard worked that their standards of discipline and efficiency are very high indeed.

Such reflections may inspire regret, but the spirit

## WINTER LULL AND SPRING OFFENSIVE 198

in which they should be taken is to remember that the circumstances of the war at that end of Europe have changed utterly, thanks to the temporary collapse of Russia and the over-running of Roumania since the expedition was despatched. The English General Staff, perhaps, had clearer vision than others in being from the first somewhat sceptical about the possibilities of carrying on operations in the Balkans on the large scale which alone would enable definite results to be obtained. But in every coalition something has to be sacrificed now and then to solidarity. If we embarked upon an enterprise which has not yet achieved anything of striking utility from the standpoint of the major aims of the war, we at least put heart into Serbia, kept our alliance united, denied the Central Powers access at an important point to the Mediterranean and established a depot of Allied military resources in the Near East which may yet play its part in hastening the final phase of the disintegration of the enemy's coalition, and has meanwhile held up more than its own weight of adversaries.

One circumstance about the attacks which were undertaken by the various Allied contingents on their respective sectors in the spring of 1917 is that they were not simultaneous.

The series opened with a French attack on March 11th in the sector between the lakes of Prespa and Ochrida in Albania. This met with the bad luck in the way of weather which seems to haunt Allied enterprises in this war. The preparations for the action had been most laborious. The one single line of supply was by road from Florina round the southern end of Lake Prespa, over seventy miles of absolutely abominable surface, and crossing, among other mountains, the Col de Pisoderi, ten miles from Florina, which is the biggest climb I have seen

## 194 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

anywhere in the whole Allied area, where the mud was so thick that you had to run in first speed even going down the steep hill. Pisoderi at this season could only be negotiated by pack-transport, the motor-lorries taking supplies on from the top.

The objective of the French was Resna, at the north end of Prespa Lake. If the early success that was planned had been won, the French cavalry, of which five squadrons were ready waiting, would have dashed on to secure the Kozjak bridge a few miles south of that town. But delay occurred, and the result was that the Germans had time to bring up reinforcements; and then a devastating snow blizzard began. I did not visit this sector of the front until a little later, but as one toiled up the sides of those steep, rock-strewn mountains in dry weather it seemed impossible to believe that the French had been fighting there with the snow lying several feet thick, for this late snowstorm was one of the worst of the whole winter.

To co-operate with this attack which was to follow a N.E. direction from between Lakes Prespa and Ochrida, a converging attack northwards was ordered from Monastir, and the dominating Hill 1248, the chief among the complex of heights which overlook the town from the north, was won, with 400 prisoners, which were in addition to 1,400 more captured by the French in that week at a cost of comparatively small casualties to themselves. But the crest of 1248 could not be maintained, and French and Bulgars remained each hanging on to the opposing slopes of the mountain, the summit remaining part of No Man's Land. But though the villages of Snegovo and Kirklina and a considerable section of the enemy first line was won, the Bulgars and Germans were still within shell range of the town, and no further progress had been made towards Resna.

## WINTER LULL AND SPRING OFFENSIVE 195

These early spring attacks had met with only local success, but the greater part of April was spent in preparing further offensives, and on April 24th it was the turn of the British to engage in the most considerable action they have yet fought in the Balkans—the attack upon the Bulgar hill positions by Lake Doiran.





## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE BRITISH BATTLE OF DOIRAN.

THE cluster of steep hills that rises from the side of Doiran Lake stands almost at the geographical centre of the Allied front. Chief among these heights are the positions of Hill 535 with the Pip Ridge—so called from the series of little hillocks on the shoulder descending towards the British lines, which are distinguished as Pips 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5—the Grand Couronné and Petit Couronné. On these steep slopes the enemy has three distinct systems of trenches about a thousand yards apart, each line higher up the hillock than those in front of it, and consequently commanding them. But it is not altitude or steepness alone which gives to these positions their formidable nature. What makes them so difficult to attack is the irregularity of the welter of smaller hills at their feet, which provides a series of natural bastions and outposts.

If you glance at a good contour map of this country by Lake Doiran, your eye will be confused by a tangle of abrupt slopes divided by steep precipitous ravines which twist in and out among a bewildering number of hillocks, spurs and under-features that make the ground especially arduous for an infantry advance.

As you look at this position from the front you are strongly reminded of an old mediæval citadel. For there, in one corner of the whole enceinte, you usually

## 198 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

find a concentrated group of towers and bastions that formed the main stronghold of the defence. Over-topping all is the keep, but assembled around that are lesser towers and turrets, each supporting, but at the same time dominating, the other, so that, should some of these works be conquered by an enemy, he still remains in a position of inferior advantage until he has won them all.

The configuration of the ground at this corner of Lake Doiran is in exact parallel to such a mediæval fortress. Hill 585 is the keep of the enemy's citadel. It towers above the other hills he holds, and ever since we took over this sector from the French, "the Dub," as it is also called, has haunted the British Army. Go where you will, that blunt, bald-browed head is looking at you. Quite a long way back from the fighting line, as you go up a ravine that apparently is open to nothing but the sky, you will find the road screened by an artificial hedge or marked "for use by night only," and should you ask why, the inevitable answer is: "Under observation from the Dub." The Dub is the strongest point of the enemy's third and main line of defence. Its twin height in the same trench system is Grand Couronné, a mile nearer Lake Doiran, and of proportions only slightly less. Both these hills are conical in shape, with steep and barren sides. The white scars of the Bulgar trenches stretch across them like a girdle, and the humps of the long rampart-like "Pip Ridge" are each strongly fortified. Pip 3 is part of the second line of defence. Pip 4½ was the westernmost objective of our first attack in force on April 24th.

After two days' artillery bombardment, which began on April 22nd, our first attack was delivered on the night of April 24th.

On the same evening, at the other end of the Vardar-Doiran front, a small demonstration

## THE BRITISH BATTLE OF DOIRAN 199

was to be made against the position known as the "Nose."

The number of guns available on each side, about 200, was about the same; but the enemy artillery ran to heavier calibre, for they had several batteries of 8-in. howitzers, which did us very great damage in our attack. In strength of infantry, too, each side was approximately equal.

Our aim in this attack of April 24th was to carry the enemy's first system of trenches, consolidate there, then bring up the guns and renew the assault on the trench systems behind. The immediate objectives of the troops actually engaged were as follows: On the left the infantry had to cross about 900 yards of ground and dig themselves in along the side of Jackson ravine, a little behind the enemy's original front line. The length of this new front of theirs would be 1,500 yards; but it had the disadvantage of being dominated not only by the enemy's second system of trenches further up the slope (the Tongue, the Knot, the Hilt, etc.), but also by the Petit Couronné and the rest of the enemy's front line which was the objective of the brigades on the right, so that if the attack on the left succeeded and the attack on the right did not, the troops on the left would find themselves under extremely exposed conditions in its new line. This, in fact, is what did happen. But the troops on the right had most difficult conditions to face in their attack; for they had to cross the very steep and rocky Jumeaux ravine, about 300 yards wide, which separated their front line trenches from those of the enemy. The infantry assault was fixed for 9.45 p.m., and half an hour before that time the enemy opened a barrage along our whole front. All up and down the high amphitheatre of hills on which the Bulgarian lines lay flickering points of light flashed out, and new

batteries constantly sprang into action to swell the thunder of the re-echoing reports. Powerful Bulgar searchlights, one in Doiran town and the other higher up the slopes behind, threw their cold white light along our front line trenches, which were fringed by dense and writhing columns of the smoke and dust of bursting shells. Through this concentrated barrage the infantry pressed gallantly on to the attack, and everywhere entered the enemy's line, only to be driven out again by the heavy fire which the Bulgar guns opened on their own captured front trenches, and by determined counter-attacks. Down by the lake our men twice reached the enemy trenches, but had to fall back each time. On their left they met with strong resistance, and the few of them who got into the enemy's front line were not strong enough to stay there. A battalion attacked Petit Couronné, and by midnight were reported to have won a footing there. Other units, too, gained temporary mastery of their objectives. But the reinforcements sent to strengthen them could not get across that death-trap of Jumeaux ravine, into which the Bulgar trench mortars were dropping a barrage of projectiles as you might pitch pebbles into a trough. Such was the force of the explosions in that narrow space that men were blasted to death against the walls of rock by the shock alone; this was in addition to ceaseless shelling by their 8-in. howitzers.

In the darkness of the ravine, lit only by the flashes of the explosions and obscured still further by a drifting haze of dust, it was difficult for the infantry to keep in touch. In parts of it there was so much water in the stream at the bottom that the men had to wade waist-deep. As one looked from an artillery observation post up that dust and flame-filled gorge, it appeared impossible for anyone to get across it alive at all.

## THE BRITISH BATTLE OF DOIRAN 201

Bulgarian reinforcements had been rushed up to the trenches from the ravines behind where they normally live in comparative safety. They fought with stubbornness and determination. "Come on, Johnny," they kept calling through the din to our soldiers struggling up the rocky slopes to reach the gaps in their wire.

The result of all this fighting was that by daybreak the whole of the two right-hand brigades were back in their original lines. The troops, however, on the left had captured the whole of their 1,500-yard objective and held it throughout the night against four counter-attacks. The position, though to this extent improved in our favour, was now an awkward one. We had, so to speak, advanced with one foot and been unable to bring the other up alongside it.

One satisfactory feature of the fighting was the chivalrous way in which the Bulgarians allowed our stretcher-parties to go out in broad daylight between the lines and pick up wounded who were left lying there after the night attack. So steep are the rocky slopes of the Jumeaux ravine and so completely is it swept by enemy fire that it would otherwise have been extremely difficult to bring in the unfortunate fellows who had been left behind when we retired from the enemy trenches. But the morning after the fighting our doctors and stretcher-bearers with great gallantry stepped out directly into the open, trusting to no other protection than the Red Cross. For a moment fire was opened upon them from the Bulgar trenches, but almost immediately an enemy officer jumped up on their parapet waving a blue flag. The fire at once ceased, and a message was evidently telephoned back to the Bulgarian batteries, for there was no shelling while our stretcher-parties were at work. The Bulgars even allowed one of them to walk through a

## 202 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

gap in their wire and pick up a man who was lying within ten yards of the enemy's parapet.

There was now a lull in the fighting for a fortnight, during which time the position remained as it had been on the morning of April 25th, the troops on the left maintaining the newly won footing in the enemy front line, though under miserably rainy weather conditions which were made even more trying by the fact that the men, living like rats in holes in the side of Jackson ravine, could not have warm food or even tea, while they were so overlooked by the enemy that to stand up, much less to move about, brought upon them shelling and enfilading machine-gun fire.

A French attack at Monastir and in the Cerna loop was to have coincided with this offensive of ours, but heavy snow, even at this advanced season of the year, came on to delay the operation. The first attack of any importance made by the Greek contingents at the front took place, however, on the evening of May 5th, and gained ground to the extent of 500 to 1,500 yards, on a front of three miles on the right bank of the Vardar.

The next day we started artillery preparation again for a renewed assault upon the Doiran sector, though this time only holding attacks were to be made west of the Jumeaux ravine, the main effort being directed to capturing the enemy's front line trenches between that and the lake. The Bulgars had by now, however, received reinforcements in guns and four new regiments of infantry, though the latter were in a rather weakened state.

With the last of the daylight on the evening of May 8th we began a violent final bombardment of the enemy's line. Right and left, in front and behind, his trenches sprang into fountains of flying earth. The dense smoke was pushed slowly along the bare slopes by the evening breeze, until by the time

darkness fell the whole of the narrow front which our infantry was waiting to attack was covered with a heavy mist, through which the brilliant Bulgar star shells shone with no more than a sullen glow.

Night had scarcely fallen when, in answer to red and green flares thrown up from Petit Couronné, the Bulgar batteries on the high ridge behind Doiran town began a like bombardment of our own entrenchments. The enemy was thoroughly aroused. His searchlights played anxiously along our front. The unmistakable sharp "crump" of trench mortars could be heard mingling with the drum-like din of the flickering batteries on the distant slopes. Sometimes would come a lull of a few short seconds, and while it lasted the "croak-croak" of the frogs in Doiran Lake alone broke the peace of the spring night, as it had done for thousands of years before high explosives were invented.

Five minutes more to "X," the secret hour fixed in advance for the first wave of infantry to cross the parapet. The uproar of our own guns reached its maximum; the flames of the discharges flickered like summer lightning all round the hills. By this time one's view of that formidable Jumeaux ravine which protects the front of the enemy's position like a moat was just an opaque blur, among which countless lights of varying intensity flared and flashed without ceasing. Overhead, just visible as a black shadow against the violet sky, one of our aeroplanes droned by and crossed over into the enemy's territory.

Then suddenly broke out a fierce rattle of rifles and machine-guns. Our men were over the parapet and moving across that tumultuous, shell-pounded open, and for the rest of the night the only explanation of what was happening before one's eyes came in the form of scrappy telephone messages from Artillery Brigade Headquarters to the battery commander.



## 204 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

The result of the night's fighting was in the end exactly the same as that of the previous attack. The enemy line was entered, but made untenable for us by bombing and counter-attacks.

Just before dawn the sectors on either side of Petit Couronné were recaptured by the enemy with the bomb and the bayonet. But the infantry in Petit Couronné still stood their ground. They were on the southern slope of the hill, the top, with the trench on the edge of it, being empty. When day broke, and all through the morning of May 9th, one could see them moving about there, picking up wounded and occasionally working up in little parties to the top of the hill, where they would be met by enemy shell-fire. Their colonel was wounded, but they hung on to Petit Couronné until 12.30 p.m., when they were called back, since the rest of the line had been evacuated, and it would have been impossible to maintain their position there.

Meanwhile, troops to the west of Krastali were carrying our line forward, but as the broad tract of ground here existing between our positions and the enemy's was only occupied by a few unimportant outposts, this amounted to little more than a re-siting of our trenches.

The natural strength of the enemy's line had combined with his equality, if not superiority, of numbers to render his resistance effective, not only against us but at other points where he was attacked along the Allied line.

For there were going on, simultaneously with this attack, similar Allied offensive movements—on the right bank of the Vardar by the French and Greeks; among the Moglena mountains by the Serbs; on the right bank of the Cerna river by the Serbs and the Russians brigaded with them; in the loop of the Cerna by the French, Russians and Italians; and

especially on that semi-circle of hills west and north of Monastir, where the French were faced by a strong concentration of Germans, Austrians and Bulgars. Local improvements of our line were made at several points, but nowhere was it found possible to drive the desired wedge into the Bulgar front.

And now the spring campaigning season was nearing its end, and it was time to think of what dispositions should be taken for the unhealthy summer. The sector principally concerned by the approach of the hot weather was the Struma. If we were to stay down by the malarial riverside, nothing could prevent a repetition of the heavy sick-list of the previous year. We were obliged to come up into the hills, and preparations for this withdrawal had been going on, in fact, for some months. But to delude the enemy as to our intentions an attack was made on May 15th upon three of his advanced groups of trenches covering the approach to the fortified village of Spatovo, which in turn bars the way to the Rupel Pass.

These systems, known as the Essex, Drumstick and Ferdie groups, were carried and seventy prisoners taken. The same evening the 29th Brigade occupied Kumli village, where they were heavily shelled, being under direct observation from Savjak ridge opposite them, but nevertheless held their ground. Other troops also moved up the railway line to Kupri in co-operation.

Though there had been little action of a prepared character on the Struma since the successful attacks on Zir, Bala, Yenikeui and Bairakli, Djuma the previous autumn, there had been constant patrol activities, for there was room enough between the opposing lines for this to be developed on a large scale. The Yeomanry held points out in front every night, where they were frequently attacked by the Bulgars. The "Battle of the Level Cross-

## 206 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

ing" became almost a standing fixture, and the infantry met constantly in Patrol Wood, between Kalendra and Hristos.

Ambushing was developed to a fine art by our troops on the Struma, and here the infantry had an advantage over the cavalry, for a mounted man's head can be seen coming above the rank crops of maize and the banks of sunken roads, so that the enemy can lie up for him with greater certainty.

But now (summer, 1917) we have withdrawn the main part of our troops from the line we had established beyond the Struma, and hold only a series of fortified bridgeheads which would be quickly reinforced from the hills if the enemy came on; but the Bulgar is as well aware of the unhealthiness of the Struma as we are. He put out placards: "We know you are going back to the hills, so are we," and now he, too, only has a strong outpost-line in the plain. The only forces that hold the Struma valley in strength are the mosquitoes, and their effectives may be computed by thousands of millions.

## CHAPTER XV.

### KING CONSTANTINE'S ATTITUDE, AND THE OCCUPATION OF THESSALY.

THE situation in Athens all this time showed no improvement in the way of the renunciation by the King of his pro-German sympathies. Nor had the Allies in their indecision and unwillingness to take extreme measures done anything to force him out of the path of hostility, veiled by a guise of neutrality, in which his inclination kept him.

There seems to have been in England at this time a general feeling of rather naive astonishment that King Constantine should ever have adopted, much less persisted in, this unfriendly attitude. We still have a somewhat insular standpoint in these matters, and do not easily bring ourselves to view a situation from the angle of the foreigner. There are no grounds for defending King Constantine; he acted unconstitutionally, deceitfully, treacherously; and besides being false to his Serbian allies, did his best to bring to naught our efforts to help them. He was wrong even in his most plausible argument—that he was acting for the good of his people. But I believe it is incorrect to imagine, as apparently many did, that his opposition to us was inspired by sheer perversity and German pigheadedness. This refusal to credit King Constantine with any sincerity or regard for the interests of his subjects, the Greeks, had the disadvantage at the time of breeding the

constant expectation in England that he would suddenly see the error of his ways, and turn and be converted to readiness to co-operate with M. Venizelos on behalf of the Allies. This seemed a consummation so reasonable and inevitable that we were always inclined to be patient and moderate, and give him just one more chance.

But the King's misguided hostility towards the Entente had its origin in many motives, and some of these at least were sincere. To begin with, King Constantine was naturally an obstinate man. You needed only to look at his big, square, fleshy, heavy head for a sign of that. He was imbued, too, with the doctrine of the Divine right of kings. Venizelos himself told me that when, in September, 1915, he urged Constantine to fulfil his treaty obligations to Serbia, the King replied: "I am content to leave the internal affairs of my country to my Government, but for its foreign relations I hold myself alone responsible before God."

Furthermore, the King had been trained as a soldier in the German Guard, and, like others among his generals of a similar experience, he saw during the first year of the war a translation into action by the Germans of so many of the lessons which he had learnt in theory at the Kriegsschule that he was very naturally filled with a profound admiration for the genius and infallibility of the German military machine. "The Germans may not win, but they cannot be beaten in a hundred years," said King Constantine to a friend of mine, walking in his garden in the summer of 1915, and the ties which bound the Greek King to Germany were concisely defined by the German Emperor himself when, on August 4th, 1914, at the very beginning of the war, he caused the Greek Minister in Berlin to telegraph to his master: "The Kaiser asks you—appealing to

you as a comrade, and reminding his brother-in-law that Greece kept Kavalla thanks to the Kaiser's support—to mobilise your army, to place yourself at his side, and to march with him hand in hand against Slavism and the common enemy. If Greece does not side with Germany," added Emperor William threateningly, "there will be a complete breach between Greece and the Empire." And all these influences, beliefs and prejudices which combined to keep King Constantine a German vassal were fortified and encouraged by his wife, that able and strong-minded lady, the Kaiser's sister, Queen Sophia.

Remember, too, that this Balkan monarch very naturally based his opinion of the Allies chiefly upon their conduct of the war in his immediate neighbourhood, and their treatment of questions in which he and his people were chiefly interested. And what a melancholy spectacle of military failure and diplomatic inefficiency it was that we placed right beneath his eyes! There was the Dardanelles. Before that operation began the Allies proposed that the Greeks should co-operate in it with us. King Constantine and his General Staff replied: "If you attack the Dardanelles you will fail: they are impregnable: we investigated the matter thoroughly in the first Balkan War." The Allies paid no attention to this warning; at that stage they could probably hardly have done so if they would. They went ahead, attacked the Dardanelles, and failed most expensively. The obvious result was that the military foresight of King Constantine and his General Staff rose immensely in their own estimation.

The summer of 1915 went on; they watched our diplomats and our statesmen at home being hopelessly bluffed by the Bulgarians. They themselves, as natives of the Balkans, knew well the bitter hatred of Bulgar for Serb, the deadly resentment in Sofia

## 210 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

of the Treaty of Bucharest, the fierce resolve of the Bulgarians not to rest until they had won back what they wanted of Macedonia. Our politicians, complacently unaware that any special or local knowledge was required for dealing with Balkan questions, gulped down the reassuring dissimulations of M. Radoslavoff, and were lulled into fatuous security by a nation of Balkan peasants until the latter were ready to strike. But the contempt which the Greeks felt for our inadequate diplomacy was increased to indignation when it was found that in the course of our negotiations with Bulgaria we had proposed that she should take the Greek port and the district of Kavalla as a set-off against what she demanded from the Serbians. What made it worse was that no mention of this altruistic proposal had been made to the Greeks, nor were steps even taken to ascertain whether the Bulgars would accept the proffered territory before the offer was officially made; the Greek people had the mortification of seeing its own possessions thrown into a bargain as a make-weight by one side, contemptuously rejected by the other, and all without their views as to this proposed disposal of their territory being ascertained at all. So that when the Bulgarians at length attacked the Serbs, and the Greek King, looking round, saw that nowhere had the war situation changed conspicuously in favour of the Allies, it is not surprising that he should have persevered in his original opinion that the Germans were the winning team. That being so, he was naturally anxious not to be on the other side. Hence his unconstitutional overthrow of M. Venizelos, who was preparing Greece to join the Allies, and hence the consistency of his subsequent efforts to keep out of the war on the side of the Entente at all costs, while showing his personal sympathy for the Germans by allowing their

agents full liberty of propaganda and action in his territory, and by doing all he could himself to obstruct and restrict our action in Macedonia. What was at the back of the King's mind in all this was the thought: "The Germans will ultimately win. When they have won I want to be able to say to them, 'I could not join you in the field; the situation in my kingdom forbade it; but this and that have I done, so far as in me lay, to help you and to hinder your enemies.'"

The difference between the political short-sight of the King and the political long-sight of M. Venizelos lay simply in this—that Venizelos looked beyond the Allies' blunders and delays and failures in the present and saw the vast resources and latent powers that would in the long run make their success inevitable. He realised that the future welfare and development of Greece would depend upon them. The King, on the other hand, could not see so far ahead. Impressed by the present strength of the Germans and by the initial failures and mistakes of the Entente, he sincerely believed that the interests of his people were united with those of the Central Powers. That belief cost him in the end his throne. These two figures, Venizelos and Constantine, therefore, were by nature irreconcilable, antipodean. Yet for months our diplomats clung with feeble obstinacy to the hope of being able to bring them together, trying to mix oil with water, to promote harmony between the wolf and the sheep-dog. And all this time Germany by her thorough propaganda work did much to strengthen the King's hand, while we did nothing at all to support Venizelos. But the faith of M. Venizelos in the Allies, which still is strong, must be considered all the more praiseworthy when you remember how Serbia and Roumania have been overrun at the very threshold of his country. It is a



## 212 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

true remark that M. Venizelos is a European and not merely a Balkan statesman. He can take big views.

In September, 1916, M. Venizelos and his friends at Athens decided that passive protest against the unconstitutional action of the King had lasted long enough, that the country was being lulled into inertia by their own apparent acceptance of the existing state of things, and that the time had come to take a strong line. They determined to leave the capital, which was done by stealth, and proceed to Crete, where the idea of a Government independent of the King appeared in the form of the "triumvirate"—Venizelos, Admiral Condouriotis, and General Danglis.

After touring the Greek islands which are the strongholds of his party, Venizelos came to Salonica. His arrival on October 9th was in a way a surprise. He himself did not know when he landed whether he would stay there or return to Mitylene. The question was, of course, one that depended to some extent on the views of the Allies, who might have seen disadvantages in the establishment of a Macedonian Government at their military base. But no objection was raised, and M. Venizelos, after a landing of great enthusiasm, at which General Sarrail appeared for a moment, though unofficially, established the headquarters of the "triumvirate" in the villa which had hitherto been King Constantine's palace at Salonica. It is an ugly house, resembling a pavilion at a Shepherd's Bush Exhibition, and decorated and furnished in the abominable taste that comes of imitating German standards, which in matters of art and architecture are supreme in the Balkans, thanks to their commercial domination of that field.

Venizelos at first abstained from definite renunciation of allegiance to the King. The purpose of his independent Government was but to guide Greece

into the path he considered the only one for her welfare. "We consider Greece," he said to me on October 10th, "to be a kingdom with two Governments in it, as in the case of all countries at civil war, though actual civil war is the development we are trying to avoid." The heading "Kingdom of Greece" was maintained on the Provisional Government's decrees. Venizelos, however, desired recognition by the Powers as a Government *de facto*, and got it in the following January, when Earl Granville and M. de Billy were appointed English and French Envoys-Plenipotentiary to the Provisional Government.

But the treacherous attack on British and French troops in Athens on December 1st changed everything.

A demand for the surrender of ten batteries of artillery by the Greek Government had not met with compliance, and the French Admiral Dartiges du Fournet landed men from the French and English warships to occupy Athens, on some alleged understanding with the King that there would be no opposition. The men were ambushed and fired on, the French losing 88 killed, and the English a smaller number. The demonstration collapsed in grotesque failure, and our landing parties were withdrawn.

It needs only a slight acquaintance with the overweening, mercurial, semi-Oriental temperament of the Greek to imagine how cock-a-hoop and arrogant the *epistrates*, or armed civilians, who formed the King's supporters at once became. They had beaten Allied troops in action; the Allies had swallowed the insult meekly. They and their King, they at once concluded, were invincible. A reign of terror began against the Venizelists of Athens. Many were shot in prison; many beaten and robbed.

We were nearer to war with the Greeks on Decem-

## 214 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

ber 2nd than we had ever been, and were none too well disposed for receiving their attack. A British monitor was sent to blow up the railway line from Athens to Larissa at the top of the Lamia gulf, where it runs on culverts within range of the sea, but the order was countermanded before it could be executed. Once more King Constantine was let off with a serious talking-to, which took the form of a demand that he should withdraw all his Army from Thessaly—"above the strength necessary to maintain order"—into the Peloponnese, south of the Corinth Canal. But before this withdrawal could be begun or arrangements made for controlling the process, our position at Salonica was most awkward.

The Allied Army had just retaken Monastir. We were pressing hard upon the Bulgars in the hope of driving them out of shell-range of the town and back to Prilep. This offensive was now stopped at once, and new positions taken up to face the fresh danger threatening our rear.

And this danger had distinct existence since we were connected with Monastir—a point to the maintenance of which we were henceforth committed—by a single line of railway 100 miles long. This line makes a great loop southwards at Verria, towards Old Greece, and was consequently exposed to the possibility of being cut and rendered useless by raiding parties of the new Greek enemy.

In conformity with the turn the situation had taken, Greek royalist troops moved north in a threatening manner, and General Sarrail recalled French detachments southwards to be ready to oppose them if necessary.

The events of December 1st had, too, a great effect on M. Venizelos's attitude. "Between me and the King there is now a lake of blood," he said to me, speaking with a vehemence noticeable even above his

usual energetic and emphatic manner. "Two hundred of my friends have been killed because they held different political opinions from those of the King; because they thought that Greece would do better to join with the Entente than with the Central Powers. For that they were murdered. King Constantine and I henceforth face each other across an impassable abyss. If the majority of the people of Greece should choose after the war still to keep the King as their ruler, I and my friends will have to leave the country." He was ready for the idea of war with the royalists, should they attack the Allies. "If I had received from the Allies the material and equipment promised me when I came here," he said, "I should now be able to hold up all the royalist Army with the troops of the Provisional Government alone. We promised to raise an army corps of three divisions, and even two army corps, by March, 1917, if the necessary equipment was provided. So far (December, 1916) none has been received. The one division we have raised was equipped with what we had in hand except for about one-tenth of its material. If in a week I could have rifles and uniforms, I could instantly mobilise the reservists of Crete and of the division of Chios, Samos and Mitylene. With these two divisions alone we could hold up the royalist Army. Should the Entente find King Constantine's troops on its hands, that will be its own fault."

But though King Constantine never actually attacked us, he was always posing as being on the point of doing so, and by that means distracted the attention and drew off some of the strength of the Allied Army in the Balkans from its main objective—the Bulgarian and German forces in front of it. The Allied Fleets were blockading the coasts of Greece all through the spring of 1917, but though this caused a certain shortage of bread, which forms a much

## 216 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

larger part of the food of Balkan peoples than of our own, it did not reduce the King to obedience by bringing him into danger of starvation, one reason being that a country which produces vegetables, fruits and sheep in such abundance as Greece can hardly lack seriously for food, and the other that the granaries of the country were well stocked with reserves of wheat. As these reserves dwindled, however, it became evident that the King's passive attitude was chiefly due to the fact that he was anxious to be allowed to reap the Thessalian corn crop undisturbed. Once this was garnered he would again be independent of foreign supplies for seven or eight months, and could begin once more with impunity to flout the Allies. By that time, indeed, with the turn that things were taking in Russia since the Revolution, he might hope that the Germans would be able to withdraw 100,000 men from that front and send them to attack us in the Balkans, which would give him an excellent opportunity for co-operation. The French Higher Command at Salonica and M. Venizelos both urged upon the Allied Governments the need for occupying Thessaly and seizing the corn crop—on payment, of course, to its owners. Not only was this a measure of self-defence, but we needed the food. The islands which had adhered to Venizelos were indeed very short of corn.

At the beginning of May the occupation of Thessaly was decided in principle by the Allied Powers, but there followed the usual period of hesitation and delay before theory was transmuted into action, and until the very day (June 10th) when the telegram authorising the operation reached General Sarrail from Paris it was always doubtful whether we should advance southwards or not.

Would the people of Thessaly support the King

in opposing our occupation? Venizelos said not, and he proved to be right. When guaranteed against the royalist reprisals by the presence of Allied troops, he maintained that the majority of the inhabitants of Thessaly would adhere to his cause.

During May Sarraïl concentrated troops on the frontiers of Old Greece, though it was not yet sure that he would be allowed to use them. Four regiments of cavalry, Chasseurs d'Afrique and Spahis, moved to the village of Servia near the entrance of the Sarandaporon pass. A Russian brigade was at Verria. Annamites, Zouaves, colonial infantry and other regiments were gathered at Kozani. The Entente Governments had decided that trouble would be less likely if Greek nationalist troops did not take part in the operation. But half a battalion of English (East Yorkshire Regiment) were detailed to co-operate under the orders of General Venel, who commanded the Division Provisoire which had been formed for the purposes of this operation. The share of the English contingent in the occupation of Thessaly was limited, however, to coming down the railway from Ekaterini, and establishing themselves at Demirli, a mosquito-ridden spot on the plain of Pharsala, where Cæsar beat Pompey. The columns which advanced into Thessaly by road and seized the chief towns were all French, and the principal one of these I accompanied, being indeed the only Englishman who had that opportunity.

We had been waiting at Servia for a week in hot summer weather—a quaint little place, called “Servia” because some Serbs had been quartered there in the time of the Emperor Heraclius. That is one of the fascinating things about the Balkans; roads are so few among the pathless mountains that all the countless hosts that have warred here since time began have had to tread exactly in each other's

## 218 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

footsteps. Xerxes and his invading multitude, or part of it, doubtless passed up this very valley to take the road we are expecting to move along any moment down the Sarandaporon pass. Very much the same problems, too, must in many respects have exercised the minds of those old warriors. Where is the next spring of good water? Is the mud in that bottom too deep for the wagons to pass? And the same old nuisances, too. Alexander the Great's legionaries probably ejaculated their equivalent for "Damn the flies!" quite as heartily and often as we did during that wait of ten days at Servia.

I never ate so much lamb in my life as in that week. There was but one alleged restaurant in Servia. It formed the lower storey of the ramshackle "town hall," and was a dismal whitewashed room with a grimy kitchen the size of a cupboard opening off it. The staff consisted of an old Greek with that grey, faded look that never washing and never taking the clothes off eventually produces, and his fat little granddaughter, Theodora, who could actually take an order in French. Not that this required a large vocabulary, for the only dish provided by the restaurant was lamb. Every morning one sat down under the great plane tree on the terrace of beaten earth that looked down the steep and rock-strewn main street, and asked, hoping against hope for a change, "*Ti echis, Theodora?*" And Theodora, disdaining to speak her own tongue to a foreigner, would reel off, in a tone of refreshing novelty, the unvarying programme: "*Agneau aux fèves, agneau aux haricots, cotelettes d'agneau, foie d'agneau, agneau rôti.*" So for breakfast, lunch and dinner one ate lamb—lamb—lamb, without even bread to relieve its monotony. I fed from every part of a lamb's anatomy at Servia except the trotters, but Theodora, when I asked for those, seemed to think I was trying

to be funny and to victimise her with some European joke.

"It's all off. We shall never start. How could you expect the Allies to come to a decision about anything?" So grumbled the impatient officers of the Spahis and Chasseurs d'Afrique as they sat under the plane tree in the evenings, drinking mastic, and cursing it, the Balkans, the delay, and the tedium of Servia with equal fervour.

And then suddenly at eleven on Sunday morning, June 10th, just as I was sitting down to lunch with a colonel of Spahis in his mess, the order came. Lunch was bolted in a flurry of final preparation, and at 3 p.m. we were off—a seemingly endless column of cavalry with a battery of artillery in support and two armoured cars, winding along the road at the foot of the mountains that led to the Iron Gates at the mouth of the Sarandaporon pass, the gateway of Old Greece. Five other columns beside this one had started simultaneously on their march from different points along the Greek frontier. In all the strength which the French were devoting to this operation was :

A "provisional division" of infantry, with another division in reserve at Ekaterini ;

Four regiments of cavalry ;

A proportionate quantity of field-artillery and some 6-in. guns.

The news which secret service agents had brought in related nothing but half-hearted preparations of opposition on the part of the royalists. Outposts of Greek gendarmes had been watching for several days past for signs of movement on our part, from the heights on either side of the Sarandaporon pass. Throughout the afternoon and all that night the long mounted column trekked on. It passed through the wooded Sarandaporon gorge, across the plateau at the southern end of it where the Greeks defeated



## 222 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

other frigidly. General Bayeras began: "I have had orders," he said, "not to oppose your entry to Larissa, and I have come to meet you to consult as to what arrangements we can arrive at for the joint occupation of the town by your troops and mine."

"That arrangement would be quite impossible," replied General Venel. "I have orders to occupy the town and take the garrison prisoners. You, *mon Général*, I must ask to consider yourself a prisoner."

This ruffled General Bayeras. He got back into his car—a big limousine of German make, driven on some appalling petrol substitute, for the importation of petrol itself had been stopped by the blockade, and the stocks in the country were all held to be sold at high price to German submarines. There the General sat and sulked awhile.

Then suddenly he got out of his car, spoke a few words to General Venel, and was into it again and over the bridge at once, with Colonel de Fourtou, in General Venel's car, behind him. "Follow them," said General Venel to me, and accordingly I brought up the rear of this little procession, which passed through streets lined with uneasy people, their shops close-shuttered behind them. I was struck by the large proportion of young men of military age whom I noticed, not only then but throughout the day, with apparently nothing to do, and it transpired afterwards that these were, as suspicion had suggested, *epistrates*, or armed reservists in plain clothes, whom the royalist Government had sent up to Larissa only a day or two before. Their rifles were hidden somewhere, and if the French had been in less strength than they were, these ambiguous individuals would have dropped the pose of peaceful citizens at a simple order and joined in shooting our troops down as heartily as they had done at Athens on December 1st.



---

*Official Photograph*

WESTING CONVOY ON  
THE KOPRIVA ROAD



When, following General Bayeras's car, we reached the barracks, we found proof of what we had already suspected—that the rapid advance of the French column had taken the Greek garrison by surprise. They had not reckoned on two night marches running. And so we came upon the officers of the barracks in full preparation for flight, which was to have taken place an hour later so as to escape surrendering to the French. Their baggage—shabby trunks, like the pitiful, battered boxes of a little maid-of-all-work—was corded and waiting for the cart. The officers themselves, in full field kit, with swords and revolvers on, were gathered in front of their mess. About a hundred soldiers, with their packs already on their backs and rifles in hand, were drawn up to one side under the trees. General Bayeras got out of his car and spoke a few sentences to the officers in Greek. Then he got back into the car and drove off, with a French soldier on the box as a sign of his captivity. Colonel de Fourtou, who had been charged by General Venel with taking the surrender of the Greek officers, naturally supposed that all was now arranged, the General having admitted that Athens ordered no resistance. The Colonel had no troops with him, not even an escort; he accordingly simply told his interpreter to invite the officers to come into the principal room of the mess building and put their swords on the table. The Colonel and the two or three French officers with him went up to the room—a bare, shabby place decorated with dreadful frescoes of the Bosphorus—and waited. There was a chatter of excited Greek voices from the corridor, but no one followed us in. “*Eh bien*,” said the Colonel mildly, “I am waiting.” The interpreter came in. “*Mon Colonel*, they say they won't give up their swords.”

“I am not here to discuss it with them,” replied

## 224 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Colonel de Fourtou. "I have orders to take their surrender. If they won't give up their swords I shall go away and it is war."

This phrase, "*Je m'en vais ; c'est la guerre,*" became, in fact, a sort of *leitmotif* of the noisy quarter of an hour that followed. I confess I was surprised at Colonel de Fourtou's calm and self-control. I had expected more severity and less consideration. Surrounded by excited, shouting Greek officers, led by Colonel Grivas, gesticulating with the absurd exaggeration which only a Greek can attain, he never raised his voice or changed his manner. "*Eh bien. encore dix minutes. Après dix minutes, je m'en vais, c'est la guerre.*"

The final ten minutes ran out with the Greeks still talking at the top of their voices, and Colonel de Fourtou was already walking into his car to go away, and order an advance in force against the barracks, when the reason for the anxiety of the Greek officers to prolong the palaver became suddenly clear. Captain Bellenger, Colonel de Fourtou's staff-captain, rode up—a soldierly figure, his face a mask of white dust after the night's march. "*Mon Colonel,*" he exclaimed, "there's a whole battalion of Evzones escaping across the cornfields at the back of the barracks."

The scene instantly became one of stir and military bustle. "Bring up the Spahis," ordered Colonel de Fourtou, and Captain Bellenger pulled his horse round and rode off at a gallop across the flat grass drill-ground. By this time about thirty mounted men had already reached the barracks independently. "Order your men to load their carbines," said Colonel de Fourtou to their officer, "and be prepared for whatever may happen. I will send you more men in a few minutes."

The Greek officers, now gathered in a lowering

but rather cowed group of about forty, heard the rattle of the bolts as the carbines were charged, and watched the despatch at full speed of messengers, one to General Venel, another to bring up the armoured cars.

Then came one of the finest little spectacles I have seen in the whole war. In front of the barracks lay a perfectly flat stretch of grass about half-a-mile long. A heavy thudding from the other end of this attracted one's attention, and there, coming at full gallop, were the Spahis, the French Moroccan cavalry, with drawn swords flashing and their little Arab horses scampering like animals possessed. The swarthy-faced soldiers had drawn out their long black locks of hair from under their turbans, a thing they only do when fighting is on hand. The wild throbbing of the hoof-beats seemed to set the ground quivering; who could stand against such troops upon the charge? Alas for vanished days when picturesqueness and efficiency could be combined in war—a couple of the dumpy Lewis guns would make a mouthful of that oncoming cloud of horsemen!

The regiments swerved into the drive and reined up with a scattering of gravel, like shingle drawn by a wave. “A battalion of Evzones is escaping!” shouted Colonel de Fourtou to Colonel Duperthuis. “*Où sont-ils?*” replied the Spahi Colonel eagerly. De Fourtou pointed down one of the avenues between the scattered buildings of the barracks, and the Spahis were off again like a mad hunting field. The Chasseurs d’Afrique, a crack cavalry regiment of Frenchmen only, followed them immediately.

They had not been gone three minutes when the firing started. Rifle shots rattled out irregularly at the other end of the barracks, and a few bullets flew past us where we stood face to face with the Greek

## 226 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

officers whose troops and ours were fighting each other only two or three hundred yards away. The situation was rather odd. There were about forty of them, all fully armed, and a hundred of their men with rifles and bayonets behind them. Our group consisted only of five or six French officers with some troopers. As a matter of fact, the French infantry had necessarily been left so far behind by the forced march of the cavalry that if the Greek garrison had stood its ground it would not have been greatly outnumbered for some hours to come. At any rate the chance of Colonel de Fourtou and his staff being suddenly fired on where they stood seemed so likely that I turned to tell my young English driver to take the car out of the danger area. He was only consoled for leaving the neighbourhood of the skirmish by the fact of a French officer demanding the van to go and fetch the armoured motor-cars which were delayed through some misdirection, and he drove off, at the full speed a Ford can achieve, with a Frenchman sitting with a drawn revolver at his side, in case the Greek reservists in the town should have taken the firing as a signal to start operations.

The armoured cars made a visible impression on the Greek officers when they at last lumbered through the barracks ; and soon their machine-guns could be heard at work, though at a greater distance than the earlier shooting, upon the fleeing Evzones.

Meanwhile an energetic French major had disarmed the Greek soldiers in front of us by shouting in an imperative manner and knocking the rifles out of the hands of any who hesitated to obey.

It was at this juncture that we noticed that two of the Greek officers who had been most prominent during the palaver about surrender, which had been interrupted by the discovery of the treacherous withdrawal of the troops, were missing. And it was

not long before one of them, Colonel Grivas, was brought in a prisoner. He had slipped away from the rest, had had his horse saddled and gone to join the troops who were fighting our men; he had even fired on the Spahis when they arrested him. Colonel de Fourtou told him that he could not understand how an officer could dishonourably start fighting in the middle of a peaceful parley, and sent him to the cells. Colonel Frangas, another fire-eater, was captured later.

All this time little bands of rounded-up Evzones and men of the other regiment of the garrison were being brought in, together with news of the French losses. Two French officers were killed and a third died later. Seven or eight men had been killed and three officers and twenty-five men were wounded.

This fighting all took place among the standing corn which spreads into the far distance without a break over the flat plain behind the barracks. The armoured cars, following the tracks through the corn, chased the fugitives for six miles. Going after them the same way one saw the Spahis strung out in a long line, beating for hidden Evzones through the wheat, which bent before their horses' breasts in yellow waves—for it was by lying ambushed in the corn that the Evzones caused most of the French losses. The cunning and deliberation of their action appeared in the incident of the tumulus, where the Spahis lost two officers killed. A little way back from the barracks is a small mound about twelve feet high rising out of the corn. On top of it an insignificant little practice trench had been dug some three feet deep. When they found that the French were after them, some of the Evzones put their tasselled caps on the parapet of this trench and then lay down in the thick corn all round. A party of Spahis drew near and seeing the caps, as it were of men standing in the



trench, rode at the mound full gallop. The Evzones held their fire until they were only ten yards away, then let fly a volley from their ambush, but I do not think that any of the Greeks remained alive more than a few minutes after their feat.

This was the only opposition to the French occupation of Thessaly. Nor was it visited with any reprisals by the French. The population of Larissa fully expected to see at least Colonel Grivas and Colonel Frangas shot in the town square. But nothing worse happened to them or to any of their officers than the descent to Salonica as prisoners.

Volo was the next town of Thessaly to be occupied. It had been a centre of the business of supplying submarines, from which its inhabitants had drawn great profits. German submarines had been so much at home there that they used to come into the port and the officers would come ashore for lunch.

A public meeting had been held at Volo on our approach to advocate resistance to the Allies. Reservists had been brought into the town. There were concealed stocks of arms, even, it was said, of machine-guns. So that preparations were made by the French for a concentration at Velestino, five miles away, before undertaking the advance on the town, and the armoured cars, always a powerful moral factor, set out from Larissa to assist.

There is a road marked as "good" on the maps across that thirty miles of almost unbroken cornfield from Larissa to Volo, but actually it is a rough, unmetalled track. There had been a heavy thunderstorm before the armoured cars started in the evening and they stuck in the mud. I left them behind and went on, but my own head lights failed. I lost the track and had to spend the night where I was, so that it was not until 8 o'clock next morning that I reached Volo, the time set for the French troops to arrive

- there. I found, however, that the Commandant of the battalion which formed the first contingent of the French force had entered the town the afternoon before without waiting for reinforcements to join him, and French pickets were already established at the entrance of the town.

The *volte-face* made by the townspeople of Volo in their attitude towards the Allies was characteristic of the quick-change of political opinions that occurred throughout Thessaly. In one and the same week there was on June 12th a meeting to denounce the Allies and support King Constantine, and then on the 15th—the French having occupied Volo on the 13th—there was a meeting to denounce King Constantine and support the Allies, some of the promoters on the platform being identical at the two meetings.

French flags appeared on every side in Volo immediately after the occupation. Failing other emblems of the Entente, a tobacconist on the sea front placarded his shop window with coloured portraits of Sir Douglas Haig, General Smuts and Sir John Jellicoe, cut from a stray English magazine. The local paper which had been fiercely denouncing the occupation of Thessaly a few days before now called upon the population to join in celebrating its “liberation from the tyranny of the King.” A stranger to the Greek temperament might indeed have been astonished that a town apparently hostile to King Constantine should have remained so long in his full allegiance. Those citizens whose antecedents were too compromising for this deathbed conversion had fled for refuge into the rocky peninsula which forms the north side of the Gulf of Volo, paying as much as £10 for a cart to take them there.

The policy of the iron hand in the velvet glove was meanwhile adroitly applied by the French in Volo. While the regimental band gave concerts on the

## 280 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

promenade in the afternoon, a proclamation indicating fourteen distinct ways in which the inhabitants might get themselves shot through resistance to the French appeared on the walls of the town.

That the expressed hostility of the people of Volo for the Allies never materialised before the French arrived into physical violence against the two English households and the few Frenchmen who were the only representatives of the Entente in the town is due in great part to what may be called the "hypnotic naval treatment" applied by the R.N.R. captain of an armed auxiliary which anchored in the port just as feelings were beginning to run high.

He was advised in a rather apprehensive manner by the French consul that an anti-Ally demonstration was about to be held on the sea front, and asked if he could not have a "landing party" ready to protect the lives of the subjects of the Entente, if necessary. The small ship's company was not strong enough for enterprises of the magnitude of landing parties to be undertaken, but the captain asked exactly where on the quay the meeting would take place. It was to be held after dark, for in Volo everyone sleeps all the hot afternoon, and the evening is the liveliest time of the day. So about 10 p.m. the anti-Ally demonstration was in full swing. Excited, stubbly-chinned royalists had begun one after another to address the crowd. Who were these dastardly aliens who were violating the territory of Greece, they asked? "Remember the glorious victories of the Balkan wars. Remember how these same foreigners were drugged at Athens on December 1st. Zito, King Constantine! Curse Venizelos! Down with the dogs of Allies!" The submarine caterers and government-paid roughs, fortified by a series of glasses of raki, were full of sound and fury, when, suddenly as a blow, there shot out of the

velvety blackness of the Ægean night a dazzling white beam of illumination which fell full upon the meeting—and stayed there without flickering. It came from the searchlight of the English ship, and its unwavering stare seemed to be looking into the face of every man of them as if to see who would speak next. But words died away on their lips. The unique spectacle was witnessed of a crowd of Greeks all silent. The die-hards who had been most vociferous a moment before found a strange difficulty in uttering more curses; the worst desperado of a royalist last-ditcher ceased to advocate armed resistance to the Allies and fixed his disturbed gaze on the persistent shaft of light that from its unseen source held them like an apparition from the next world. They simply could not talk with that thing staring at them. They fidgeted and smiled uneasily and whispered to each other (as if they might be heard as well as seen), and then, individually and inconspicuously, they slipped away into the grateful obscurity of the surrounding darkness.

After that the searchlight was simply master of the situation. The sea front of Volo, where the Allies had been so often eaten up in the mouths of royalist blow-hards, became as deserted as the promenade of a third-rate watering-place in the off season. Royalists whose consciences were only lightly burdened, and those who could not go without their evening raki, did indeed assemble decorously the following evening at the tables in front of the chief café. There the searchlight left them alone at first, but suddenly, its suspicions being roused, it flashed a sudden glance at them. Then a curious but significant thing happened. Nearly all the Greeks at the café, including the fire-eating royalists of the night before, rose to their feet and took off their hats. It was a confession of defeat. The

## 232 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

searchlight had been too much for their nerves; it had broken their *moral*, and in saluting that little converted Irish excursion steamer they were uncovering to the watchful determination of the British Navy, the spirit of which she represented just as fully as any super-dreadnought in the North Sea.

Trikkala, Karditsa, and other towns in the Thessaly corn area were occupied by French troops at the same time as Volo, and the Italians showed especial energy in co-operating with this movement, carrying the extension of their sphere of military influence even to Grevena and Janina.

The British detachment—500 picked men of the East Yorkshire Regiment—who had come from Doiran, were at Demirli, a flat, featureless, mosquito-ridden railway junction in the middle of the monotonous cornland. They supplied patrols which visited the villages around in conjunction with the French Spahis, to show the peasants that infantry as well as cavalry was available for the suppression of any resistance.

Searches for arms and the seizure of them had been going on since the first entrance into Thessaly and before I left, ten days later, 30,000 weapons of all sorts had been collected. Such a motley assortment of shooting-irons could not be found outside a museum. They varied from long Albanian flintlock guns of the eighteenth century to modern cavalry carbines and from horse-pistols to automatics.

The occupation of Thessaly by French troops brought to an end some other Allied activities which had been going on there inconspicuously but actively for over a year. The story of them is more like the plot of an American crook cinema film than anything I have heard in the war, but they were none the less most valuable to our cause and not unattended by risk to the officers who conducted them.

These were the measures by which we countered the German Secret Service in Greece, and did our best to suppress the supplying of petrol to enemy submarines. The military officers who were working against the Germans in Greece met them with their own methods ; the enemy was subtle and secret ; so were we ; they were ruthless, and so, when occasion demanded, we did not hesitate to use severity too.

One of the principal duties of these Allied officers was to stop couriers who frequently went, or tried to go, from Athens into the Bulgarian lines, taking spy reports and information of all kinds useful to the enemy which had been collected in Greece. These men, disguised as peasants, or sometimes peasants themselves, would travel by road and contrive to slip across to the enemy through our lines by little known tracks across the mountains in Albania.

The Germans were prepared to pay big money to men who would get these despatches of theirs through. The only way we could stop the system was by making it so risky a business that no one could be found to attempt it. A French officer who was employed for months in hunting down enemy couriers told me that the price offered for one journey rose in the end to £2,000—part paid on starting, part on delivery of the despatches. The way the French officers charged with preventing this information from reaching the enemy used to work was this. They had a local intelligence service of their own, recruited chiefly among roadside innkeepers. These men would inform the Allied officer of the arrival at their establishments of anyone they suspected of being an enemy courier. "The man is about thirty ; black hair and moustache ; 5 feet 8 inches tall ; wearing a European brown suit, much worn, and a soft hat ; says he is a commercial traveller for an Athens

## 234 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

cutlery business. He is sharing an *araba*, a country travelling carriage, with three others. It is drawn by three horses—two bays and a black. They will start at 5 a.m. to-morrow along the road for Korytza."

When the Allied officer got such a report as this, he secretly collected three or four of the unofficial "police" whom he had in his pay. These fellows were sometimes Cretans and consequently convinced Venizelists, who wanted on principle to work for the Allies; sometimes just tough customers willing to do anything for money for anyone. Our man would give the slow-moving *araba* time to get well out into a lonely part of the country and then start off after it with his men in a Ford car. After an hour or so along the deserted road they would catch sight of a fully laden carriage crawling along ahead at a slow trot. The car, overtaking it, passed without even slackening speed, but as it drove by the Allied officer had a good look at its occupants. Yes, the wanted man was there.

The Ford passed on in a cloud of dust. If the enemy courier had had qualms of uneasiness at the unusual sight of four civilians in a motor car, he was reassured. They were not looking for him anyway; all was well. But a mile or so further on, at a turn of the road, those same four men with drawn revolvers would spring out suddenly from behind the rocks. "Halt! That man in the brown suit get out with all his luggage. Now the rest of you drive on and don't try to come back, or there'll be trouble."

The companions of the now trembling German agent were always too terrified to think of refusing obedience. They were only too glad to save their own skins and hurried their wretched team of horses on, leaving him in our hands.

Once or twice the German military attaché in Athens who despatched these men did receive an

intimation that all had not gone well with them. Each courier carried a receipt to be signed by the enemy staff officer to whom he should deliver his despatches. That receipt occasionally arrived back at the German Legation in Athens signed with an initial and the words "*officier du controle allié.*"

And no less romantic work was being done at the same time by the officers of the British patrol boats which were trying to stop the supplying of petrol to German submarines by Greek fishermen. Night after night, British naval officers, who let their beards grow straggly and untrimmed for the purpose, would be rowed ashore to a deserted part of the beach in the disguise of a Greek peasant, and with an interpreter would sit about in native coffee-houses listening for stray references to stores of petrol, or meeting agents of their own to receive reports. They found petrol in most unlikely places; more often their informers would take them to hiding-places where petrol *had* been. Once it was in a tiny little chapel on a lonely hillside, and the space under the altar smelt so strongly of the petrol that the priest had been concealing there that the stock could only have been removed an hour or so before.

"I was coming back one day from a hunt among the islands after a submarine that had been reported," begins a story of one of the captains of these patrol ships, "when I caught sight of a motor-boat a good way out at sea making for the Greek shore. I came up with it and I saw that in it, alone, was a man whom I had long known to be supplying petrol to the Germans but whom I had never been able to catch in the act. I realised at once what he had been doing. He had been out with a full cargo of petrol to meet a submarine at a lonely rendezvous, and he was now on the way back. The thing was as clear as the daylight, but what proof had I on which to arrest him? He



## 236 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

probably had his pockets stuffed with money that the skipper of the submarine had paid him, but it would be Greek money and would not compromise him. If I arrested him without full proof I should only get my hair curled and the scoundrel would probably be paid compensation. So I just steered straight for him. If there were a collision and he sank, it would be a regrettable accident for which I should take full responsibility—with a light conscience when I remembered all the poor fellows of ours he had helped to drown for money. He saw me coming and knew what I was after. He altered course just in time and my ship shot past, with the wash rocking him. I turned and chased him and during the next half-an-hour that petrol merchant had more excitement than in all his life before.

“I was faster and much bigger, but his little open boat could of course turn much quicker. It was like a bull chasing a mongrel. We made full speed after him, while his motor-boat with wide open throttle did its best seven knots through the water and he sat there with his ugly face turning white over his shoulder as he took terrified glances astern. Just as my bows were on top of him he would put his helm hard over and scurry off on another course with us coming round in a circle after him and closing upon him again. It took him thirty-five minutes to get back to the lonely little creek where he kept his boat, and he had enough narrow escapes of a watery end in that time to scare him out of the petrol-running business for good. I never heard of him trying to sell another single tin to a submarine.”

General Sarrail came from Salonica to visit Larissa and Volo on June 20th, and had a welcome of apparently thorough cordiality. At Volo 4,000 people gathered cheering in front of the Town Hall. Some of the most lovely fruit I have ever seen was

offered to us there, brought by young girls, dressed in white, of that fleeting and exotic but remarkable beauty that you sometimes find in Greece. The people's friendly attitude was a sign of the success of the long-debated, long-hesitated operation of occupying Thessaly.

Such is the most plain and straightforward story of our relations with the Greeks and the occupation of Thessaly by the Allies. What secret reasons of state or what varied motives may have controlled the development of the Allies' action in all these matters, hastening or retarding it, I have not discussed here. I know that in Balkan affairs, especially, an obvious and self-evident reason should always be received with doubt as the primary cause of any event. I have heard more than one interpretation of the course which the history of our relation with the Greeks actually followed. There is much, indeed, that is mysterious in this complicated Balkan situation which has resulted in a vastly expensive Allied force being held up for two years in a barren region at the other end of Europe without accomplishing anything proportionate towards the aims of the war. The cryptic influence of the Jews; the restraint upon strategy imposed by the Parliamentary politics of some Allied countries; the alleged existence of financial aims to be gratified in Greece—these are some of the explanations, probable and improbable, that you will hear from people who profess to be acquainted with the facts of the situation. One could not with propriety examine into these motives, even if one would, and my own opinion is that until all the documents now held secret in different countries, Allied and enemy, are revealed, there will be very few men indeed who know the inside story of the Allies' doings in the Balkans these two years past.

## 238 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

And meanwhile, if one turns one's back upon the recondite, the simplest explanation seems to fit the facts as well as any: that the Greek King was hostile, even if only passively hostile, to us, for the reasons I have given; that General Sarrail believed, and had sufficient apparent reason for believing, that the rear of his Army was in danger from the Greeks; and that the province of Thessaly was occupied by the Allies to remove this danger. Other motives may have tended to confirm the choice of the course which was acted upon, but it seems to me at least that the apparent and ostensible reasons for that choice were enough in themselves.

The leading factor of the future of our Balkan Army still remains a moot question. Just as the failure of the Greeks to keep their treaty pledges and their plighted word handicapped and limited the Salonica Expedition at its beginning, so the tardy atonement of the Greek nation for that defection may yet advance the successful end of the enterprise.

The value to the Allied cause of the Greeks as soldiers is increased by two facts: First, they are soldiers on the spot; you have not to go through the slow, costly, and risky process of shipping them out there first. Secondly, as regards supplies, they can to a great extent be fed from the resources of their own country, since they are already living on those resources as civilians.

As fighting material they are not at all bad. The French Staff officers attached to them, who do not distribute praise lightly, are well satisfied with the way the divisions already at the front have settled down. Of course, they have much to learn, like all raw troops in this war. Their own idea that the Balkan campaigns had proved them warriors by instinct as well as experience brought them one or two rude shocks at the beginning.

As regards personnel, the Greeks naturally lacked good generals, capable of commanding such a campaign as this. There are, however, some thoroughly efficient officers of high regimental and staff rank who have received their military education in France and Germany. The company officers and N.C.O.'s are full of goodwill, but, as I say, untrained. For educational purposes each Greek regiment when it goes up to the front is for a time linked with a French one.

When I was in Thessaly with the French troops the peasants were saying, "Rather than go to the war I would take refuge in the mountains." But it is in the character of the Greek to accept authority without much trouble if it is firmly enforced, and M. Venizelos will probably be able gradually to put his army into the field on condition that the Allies make up the defects in its existing equipment.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE GREAT IMPEDIMENTS : TRANSPORT AND FEVER.

IF the Allied campaign in the Balkans has met with little positive success, the reason chiefly lies in two important conditions, the prejudice of which weighs much more heavily on us than upon the enemy. Both as regards transport and as regards fever the balance of advantage has always been with our opponents, thanks to the physical characteristics of the region in which we are fighting.

One of the principal factors of the success of an army in the field is obviously the ease and rapidity with which reinforcements, war material, ammunition, and supplies can be brought up to the fighting-line. And in calculating this, the distance of the battle-front from the base, in the ordinary military sense of the term, is of much less importance than the accessibility of the base from the manufacturing districts at home where the weapons of war are forged.

In this respect it would have been difficult to find another theatre of war in the world where the advantages of the situation were more completely on the side of our enemies than is the case in the Balkans. We are on the outside of the circle all the time. Our source of supplies, England, and our area of operations, Salonica, are both on the circumference, and we have to come round a great arc, 2,000 miles long, from one to the other. The

## 242 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

enemy's supply base, the manufacturing districts of Germany, is at the centre of the circle, and he has only got to bring his material of war down the straight, short line of a radius to get to the same battle-zone. The comparative advantages and drawbacks of inside and outside lines could not be illustrated more glaringly.

The Germans load up a railway truck with shells in an Essen factory yard and that same truck travels in perfect security over the best railway system in Europe without breaking bulk, right up to the Bulgar railhead, not a dozen miles behind the front we are fighting them on. What happens to a truck-load of shells that we send out from Birmingham? It travels down to a port and is there transferred to a ship. Then it either starts on a three-thousand-mile voyage by way of Gibraltar, with a good chance of being sent to the bottom by a submarine on the way, or it is taken over to a French port, discharged, and loaded again on to a truck, which crosses France to another port, where it is once more put on board ship, and still has to face the danger of torpedoing in the narrow seas of the *Ægean*.

In case of need, the enemy can rush a whole division of reinforcements with all its equipment out to the Balkan front from Germany in six days. I should think it would take us three weeks at least to put through a similar process on our side.

The consequence of this has been that we have simply had to go without things in the Balkans which we really need if we are to do anything. Heavy artillery, tanks, unlimited gun ammunition—such things have not been available for the Balkans hitherto owing to the long and exposed transport system, with frequent breakings of bulk, which was the only way of getting them out there. ❧

I have made frequent references throughout this

book to the conditions of local transport in the Balkans. They are very bad indeed. We have improved the existing railways, and built sidings and loops and supplementary lines; we have immensely increased the number of main roads (two) which existed in Macedonia when we got there, and have raised many others to a standard of surface and gradient which enables them to carry motor traffic.

But still the problem of moving supplies and material of war in the Balkans is very great; the country is so hilly and the hills are so impassable, with their stony, rocky sides, scored with deep ravines and covered with impenetrable scrub, through which neither man nor horse can force a way except with the greatest labour. To feed Luzista on the Struma from Likovan on the Seres road over tracks that have been cut along the side of these hills needs five echelons of pack-transport.

And however much you work at your roads, however many Greek labour gangs, stone-crushers, special tip-up stone-carrying lorries and steam-rollers you may accumulate there, when you use one single highway as fiercely as we use the Seres road, you can't prevent it simply crumbling away out of existence under your wheels when the winter rains start soaking it.

With the muddy season you have to increase the number of your lorries; this, in turn, helps on the disintegration of the road. Last winter we had motor-lorries pounding up the Seres road, day and night, together with ambulance cars, staff cars and horse limbers innumerable. The result was that the road simply disappeared. Last February I drove—or rather bumped and crashed wildly over—long sections of it on the hill above Orliak bridge, where it was worn into holes that made it far more like a flight of irregular stairs or the bed of a moun-



tain cascade than the principal supply route for the British Forces in Macedonia. They told me that my Ford probably wouldn't be able to get down the hill; certainly it wouldn't be able to get up; the only motor vehicle that could manage that road, as it then was, being a four-wheel-drive tractor, which is first-cousin to a tank. Without any exaggeration there were stretches on it where, if it had not been for the ditch on each side, you would not have known that it had ever been a road at all. You would have thought you were on a bit of the earth's aboriginal rough surface.

The consequence was that instead of supplies being taken forty-five miles up the Seres road by motor transport, the lorries during ten whole weeks in January, February and March could only carry them thirty-five. Horse transport had to do the rest, right up to the front line, twenty miles on—and when you think how many limbers it needs to take over the load of one lorry, you can imagine the block on that road. To complicate things still more there were many places where even horse transport could only use one-half of the road at a time, the other half having been ground up into a treacly pulp of mud. It must have been a ghastly experience to be brought down from the Struma wounded, in an ambulance wagon, last winter. It was exhausting enough to do the journey on the front seat of a motor-lorry: you were constantly thrown so high in the air by the bumps that your head hit the roof of the hood. Fine fellows those M.T. drivers proved themselves to be. They started driving at four in the morning; they were often not back in Salonica till nine o'clock at night. Sometimes they had had nothing but cold bully and biscuit all that time. Frequently they were so dead beat at the end of their run that they had to

be lifted off their seats. Long after dark the long convoys were streaming up and down the endless hills, with head lights gleaming like a string of incandescent pearls. It can be no comfortable job to steer a three-ton lorry all day and half the night over such a surface, and that there was danger in it was not unseldom shown by the sight of a lorry upside down on the steep slope beside the road, its driver having blundered in the dark.

The supply and transport service of an army is one which gets little public appreciation when things go well, and is the first to be objurgated if a hitch occurs, no matter whose the real responsibility may be. Certainly in Macedonia it is the most important branch of our whole military organisation; on it everything, literally, depends. And it has fought gamely and with a great measure of success against difficulties such as no supply system of any modern army has ever had to face in the past—difficulties which turned out to be greater even than was anticipated.

“The state of the roads, both in regard to surface and gradients, has placed a great strain on all motor vehicles, and it redounds to the credit of all officers concerned with the administration and executive control of mechanical transport that the vehicles have been kept in a state to undertake the journeys that have necessarily been performed.”

That is the praise accorded to the S. and T. branch of the Salonica Army by the Commander-in-Chief, General Milne, in his despatch of December, 1916, and when that was written the M.T. organisation had its time of greatest strain still to come.

Particularly responsible, and particularly trying, has been the work of keeping the motor vehicles on the road. Macedonia plays the very devil with cars and lorries. You need more spare parts and springs

in two months of Balkan motoring than you could find use for in two years of driving at home. And the repair situation was complicated by the constant possibility that a shipload of urgently needed spare parts might be torpedoed and sunk on its way out to Salonica. But the Base M.T. depot—under the command of one of the youngest lieutenant-colonels in the Army Service Corps, his promotion having been won by merit displayed under these arduous circumstances—grappled with, and gradually overcame, the problem of maintaining in being a mechanical transport service in a country where motor vehicles had never been thought possible before. .

The Army Corps on the Struma was the worst off, because it had no railway to supply it, and every round of ammunition, every bale of forage, and every tin of bully had to come up one narrow ribbon of road; but the roads in the sectors of our Allies in the Balkans were just as bad. I shall never forget that patch between Voden and Ostrovo on the Monastir road. It was only a hundred yards long, but for some reason it was left unrepaired, and it usually took one hour or two to get over it. The road before you reached it, and after you passed it, was not so bad. "It had bottom," as a friend of mine, well versed in Balkan travelling, would say. That meant that although your wheels might be six inches out of sight in liquid mud, below that there was solid ground, perhaps the stone foundation of an old Turkish road, so that they would grip and you could get on. Accordingly, one car after another—there are not many cars on the Monastir road—would come splashing and skidding along, seeing nothing unusually bad ahead, and would charge into this slough of despond, where every one of them would stick like flies on a fly-paper, with their engines racing just as unavailingly as a fly

frantically beats its wings. When this happened to your own, you would get out of the car, gingerly insert your legs half-way up the calf into the mud, and examine the situation. The Ford would be up to the axles, and lying over at a drunken angle to one side. "I should try backing her," you say to the chauffeur. He backs her, with the only result that the wheels skid round at a dizzy speed and complete your personal demoralisation by splat-tering you all over from head to knees with mud; from the knees downward you were under mud already.

Then you look around for Greeks, or, better still, a team of bullocks. If these are in sight all is yet well. Every sensible car carries its own tow-rope; you hitch on the bullocks or the Greeks and you are extricated at the cost of a small backsheesh. But if the landscape is empty you must take the sack that the spare inner tubes are kept in and go and look for stones. You stagger back with these, and the driver uses them to build for each wheel an individual little causeway to run on out of the mud. After this he lays a foundation of particularly big stones under the back axle, puts the jack on that, jacks up the car as high as he can get it, and then, with all the passengers shoving, regardless of rank, age or condition, you may struggle out, but are more likely to skid off the laboriously laid causeways and have to start all over again. I once had to wait two hours till reinforcements for the Italian Army came marching up the road and I could get the help of five of them who were not employed in man-handling their own mule-carts through the morass, to lift my Ford practically bodily and put it back on dry ground.

But if you want to have an accurate idea of what the conditions have been in the Balkans with regard

## 246 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

in two months of Balkan motoring than you could find use for in two years of driving at home. The repair situation was complicated by the possibility that a shipment of parts might be intercepted en route to Salonica. But the command of the Army was won by means of a

of road, in the fact that the road was long but for some it usually took one hour to reach before you reached the end of the road. That meant that although the road was solid ground, perhaps the of an old Turkish road, so that you could get on. Accordingly, there are not many of these roads.

frantically beats to  
to your own, you will  
insert your legs back  
and examine the struts  
to the axles, and try  
one side. "I should  
to the chauffeur. He  
result that the wheels  
and complete your per-  
tering you all-over for  
from the knees down  
already.

Then you look at  
a team of bullocks. It  
well. Every sensible  
you hitch on the lines  
are extricated at the  
But if the landscape  
sack that the spare parts  
and look for stones. You  
and the driver uses them  
individual little causeway

After this he lays a board  
stones under the back axle  
jacks up the car as high  
with all the passengers  
age or condition, you may  
more likely to skid off the hill  
and have to start all over again. I  
two hours till reinforcements for the hill  
came marching up the road and I saw  
help of five of them who were not engaged in  
handling their own mule-carts through the  
practically badly and not  
de when at rest.

## T IMPEDIMENTS 251

mmencement of operations.  
e scarce, and this alone added  
iculties experienced.

and the Base expanded, the  
to be inadequate. Surface  
egards quantity, were bad in  
was had to artesian boring.  
nine wells have been sunk,  
ed requirements to be met.  
atage was taken of the ancient  
ntry round, which constitute a  
-lines, some dry and others  
d good supplies have been  
s whose origin is lost in  
e of these lines, often cross-  
ous indication of the un-  
in times past, as they  
of considerable pros-  
ble during which  
st. Incidentally,  
has been

ma  
ing the  
tements  
country

of Mace-  
anopheles,  
ction from  
by the facts

## 250 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

“Many cross-country tracks have been made passable for horse-drawn traffic. But the main roads on which lorry traffic is possible are still only three, spreading fanwise and diverging as they go.

“Light railways have, to a great extent, enabled the country off the Sarigöl and Seres roads to be opened up, and constitute important lateral communications in a country otherwise closed to all but light-wheeled or pack transport.

“There are other difficulties. The local labourer is not by any means a pattern of industry. Centuries of massacre have taught him to avoid the semblance of riches, and the country population is, in consequence, the result of the survival of the poorest; in the rich soil of Macedonia, the laziest. And the difficulty of obtaining even this labour is not decreased by the demands of the army.

“Macedonia is to all intents and purposes a desert. Everything has to be imported. In the beginning Salonica was undoubtedly the Cinderella of our Mediterranean efforts, and Salonica had largely to subsist on what could be spared after Gallipoli and Egypt had been satisfied. With the increase in the force, and the shifting of the strategic centre, this drawback has disappeared, but there is still a long interval between the time stores are demanded and that of their receipt. This is, of course, inevitable, as it is often impossible to foresee requirements until they appear. One consequence of this is that only works of the simplest description have been carried out; but a considerable amount of latent ingenuity has been brought to the surface by force of circumstances, and improvisation has had to be resorted to in a marked degree.

“It is to be feared that a somewhat exaggerated opinion of the resources of the town and district

prevailed at the commencement of operations. Tools in particular were scarce, and this alone added considerably to the difficulties experienced.

“As the Force grew and the Base expanded, the supply of water began to be inadequate. Surface wells, while good as regards quantity, were bad in quality, and recourse was had to artesian boring. As many as twenty-nine wells have been sunk, and these have enabled requirements to be met. At the same time advantage was taken of the ancient aqueducts in the country round, which constitute a network of old pipe-lines, some dry and others running to waste, and good supplies have been recovered from sources whose origin is lost in antiquity. The existence of these lines, often crossing one another, is a curious indication of the unsettled history of the country in times past, as they must have been made in times of considerable prosperity succeeding periods of trouble during which the records of their precursors were lost. Incidentally, the reopening of these sources of water has been of value in drying marshy tracts. The plains of Salonica and its neighbourhood are full of malaria, and the steady draining and drying up of marshy ground, both as such and as a means of obtaining water, cannot but have a beneficial effect on the health of the district. As a matter of fact, malaria was almost non-existent in the town itself during the summer of 1916, and, according to the statements of inhabitants, was much reduced in the country immediately round the town.”

Among the most prominent institutions of Macedonia is that horrible little creature the anopheles, a mosquito who carries the malarial infection from one man to another, and may be known by the facts that :

1. He sits up in a hunchbacked attitude when at rest.



## 252 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

2. He does not make a singing noise.

3. He usually has spotted wings (but you must catch him first to ascertain this).

4. When he is killed he lies flat, not curled up, like other kinds.

He breeds in, and lives near, swamps or stagnant water, rests all day, comes out at sunset, and proceeds to make a meal off any human being who is handy. If one of his victims has malarial germs in his blood, the mosquito transfers them to the blood of the next person he bites.

Macedonia is one of the most malarial places in the world. Hippocrates, I am told, wrote a treatise on the disease as he had observed it there, and distinguished between three different kinds. It kills off large numbers of the natives, and not one of them but has got it in his blood and has an enlarged spleen. That is why they are so sallow and unhealthy looking. In places where the mosquitoes have become particularly bad, as on part of the Struma, where the river has altered its course and left swamps that provide the mosquito with suitable breeding grounds, you will find whole villages deserted, evacuated under the compulsion of this fragile but deadly little beast, the anopheles.

The worst of malaria is that once you get it you are liable to go on having it. Men who were first infected last summer kept on going sick for a few days with the same thing regularly all winter. They call them recurrent cases.

Your symptoms are a high temperature combined with a chilly feeling; you can't stand the sight of food; you probably have a headache; you tremble all over, and you simply have to go to bed and shiver and sweat alternately until the attack is over. This sort of thing repeated several times leaves you very thin and weak. The only thing to do is to

take quinine regularly, about five grains a day, when you are exposed to infection, and to go to all the trouble you can to stop mosquitoes from getting at you. Neither of these gives perfect security, but they help. In some Salonica hospitals they used intravenous injections of quinine.

When we first arrived in Salonica at the beginning of winter a map was made of the Base area with all the swamps and pools of water marked. These were drained by Greek labour or filled in, or, where both those methods were impossible, they were sprayed with paraffin. The result of this has been that round Salonica itself there is very little malaria now, but you cannot carry out those processes in the Struma valley, which has ever so many square miles of swamps and stagnant water. The only thing to do there is to come out of it, and away up into the hills in the summer where there are no mosquitoes. That is what we have done this summer, leaving only outpost and bridgeheads to hold the Struma line. And as the Bulgars would have just as bad a time as we if they came down into the valley in force, the field is more or less left to the mosquito alone.

But malaria is by no means the whole tale of the plagues of Macedonia. There are dysentery and diarrhoea, both very weakening, and almost unavoidable, at any rate to a mild degree. For these the flies are chiefly responsible. In fact, the fly is probably as deadly as the mosquito. The only way to keep down flies is to see that they get at nothing to feed on. All food must be in boxes with wooden lids, which are kept shut. Nor will flies go where it is dark, so that latrine trenches are made eight feet deep.

There is a sort of local heat fever, too, in Macedonia which is very trying. It lasts four days,

## 254 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

begins with pains in the neck and head, and causes very high temperatures, up to  $106^{\circ}$  and even higher.

Last year men would often get malaria and dysentery together, and then they had little chance. This year, thanks to the greater knowledge which has come with experience, an official message published August 11th was able to say: "Cases of malaria are slightly fewer than last year. Dysentery and diarrhoea are appreciably less prevalent. The admission rate for fevers other than malaria shows a reduction of nearly four-fifths."

On the figures for 1916—which, of course, have since changed for the better—Salonica's rate of admissions to hospital for sickness was nearly two and a half times that of France, but only one-third of that in Mesopotamia.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS IN MACEDONIA.

MACEDONIA is a country of big horizons, a bare and treeless land with monotonous stretches of plain, covered with thin grass, and ranges of hills that are masses of evergreen scrub. Its most characteristic features are the frequent nullahs that make it a most futile thing to attempt to cut straight across what looks like an open stretch of country; the steep and narrow little ravines are not to be seen until you are right upon them, and if you scramble in and out of one in the hope that it may be exceptional you only find that you have let yourself in for a very slow and laborious journey.

In the sector that our troops occupy there are no mountain positions such as the boulder-strewn heights, with their fangs and pinnacles of sheer rock, where the Serbs and Italians have been fighting in the loop of the Cerna river further west; nor anything so steep as the jagged peaks between Ochrida and Prespa lakes, where the French began their last spring offensive with a fight in a blinding snowstorm. "Gibraltar," a sheer and naked pyramid of rock, rises in the middle of our Army area, and there is the commanding height of Mount Hortiach close behind Salonica, but neither of these has called for occupation by our troops. The greatest mountain of all in the whole Allied line is the 8,000-feet-high Kaimakchalan, where the Serbs

## 256 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

fought well on into last winter among the bitter snow, and above, the damp grey mists that veiled it from our eyes below like the scene of an Olympic battle.

Except for the black wall of the Belashitza mountains in the Bulgarians' country over against our lines, there is nothing that can be called grand or imposing in the part of Macedonia where the British Army is campaigning. The lack of trees or rocks to break the monotony of the rolling plain, the rarity of water, make of it a landscape of which you soon tire. I cannot imagine anyone now belonging to the Salonica Army being filled with yearning in years to come by the memory of its natural beauties. Not but what there is much there that is picturesque. I myself have a view above all preferred, and that on the very outskirts of Salonica itself. I hit upon it quite by accident one Sunday in the winter. I had been out for a ride with a paper-hunt, organised by officers at the Base, who took revenge upon their sedentary duties by that form of exercise on Sunday afternoons, and instead of returning home by road I made across the hills towards the old citadel of Salonica that overtops the town walls at their highest point on the landward side. For a time the rolling slopes around hid all sight of the town, and then quite suddenly, as you came over a rise, there rose up before you the long line of the mediæval wall, with bastion, tower and battlement, each standing out in silhouette against the sky. The empty countryside reached to its very foot; no modern building clashed with the completeness of the mediæval scene. High and stern and solid, softened by no sentimental growth of ivy, marred by no decay, the grey stone ramparts faced the naked wilderness, abruptly marking off the desert from the town, standing in ample defence of the riches of the towns-

people within against the greed of the marauding barbarian without. To come upon such a scene in the rich light of a flaming sunset, and to approach it by so archaic a manner of motion as on the back of a tired horse, was to swing back at once in imagination through several centuries. One looked at the grim towers just as many a road-weary traveller must have seen them with the relief in his heart of once more beholding signs of the civilisation that he had left behind him at the Danube. That glint of light from an embrasure might be from the helmet of the watchman of the gate, and the distant hooting of a steamer in the port sounded to the fancy-haunted ear like the winding of his horn.

But if you are going to give rein to your imagination, Macedonia will have much fascination for you. The feet of many of the world's most historic figures have trodden the dust and mud of this bleak land. Start out from the town along the Monastir road, past main supply depots, field bakeries, R.E. parks, and through a never-ceasing stream of motor-lorries, limbers, ambulance cars and dingy Greek labourers on foot. You are following the exact line of the old Roman Egnatian Way that led from Durazzo on the Adriatic shore to Constantinople. Pompey travelled along it in his horse litter; and you will probably meet an English general going precisely the same way in a touring car. Fifteen miles out from Salonica, where the naked, untilled plain stretches away out of sight all round, as empty as the prairie, with no sign of human habitation, you will come suddenly upon a great stone fountain by the side of the road. There is no fountain in London so big; it is even larger than the Fountain of Trevi in Rome. You climb up steps to the side of a cistern big enough to swim in, and there are basins and cascades of water all around. No

## 258 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

one uses that fountain now, except an occasional Macedonian peasant watering his bullock team in the middle of their slow day's march, but once it was the centre of a big city; for centuries perhaps people came there every day to draw their water; they gossiped round it, made love round it, fought round it. For it stood in the market-place of the capital of Philip of Macedon, and only a little further off you will see rising incongruously out of the empty plain a great fragment of a lofty wall, immensely thick, which once formed part of the defences of that wealthy city, of which no other traces but these remain. But you have only to poke about among the stones and you will pick up in five minutes half a dozen fragments of the glazed household pottery of two thousand years ago, and you will notice, too, that what look like shapeless boulders lying about are often the broken and weather-worn fragments of the carved capitals of marble pillars. Pella, for so the place is marked on the maps, no doubt once seemed to whole generations of people as permanent and immutable as Piccadilly Circus does to Londoners. When the war is over I feel inclined to buy a job lot of picks and shovels and carts, which, like many other Army implements, will be going for an old song in Macedonia then, and peg out an excavating claim on the site of Pella. It is so tantalising when your car has a puncture near the fountain to walk about on the rough grass and say to yourself, "Here, where I am standing, there may be another Venus of Milo or a Winged Victory a bare ten feet underground, while there, by that stone, the High Priest of the city buried the gold vessels of the temple when the barbarians swept down." When you think of all the burying of valuables that went on in the days when there were no banks and no safe deposits, the dingy green

grass that covers Pella begins to take on the gleam of an El Dorado.

It was in the company of General Sarrail that I first visited the site of the vanished city. The French Commander-in-Chief seldom has time for an excursion of any kind, and this one, indeed, was combined with the inspection of the cavalry outposts that were all we had at that time (February, 1916) along the Monastir road. I got the invitation overnight from the General's son-in-law, Captain Bouet, and it brought home to me how strenuously Sarrail takes even his rare distractions. "The General would be glad if you would accompany him on an excursion to-morrow to see the ruins of Pella. Start from Headquarters at 5.45 *a.m.*" I rose at 5.15, a most unpleasant hour in February. Punctually to the stroke of a quarter to six Sarrail appeared at the door of the Headquarters building. He had already been through the reports that had come in during the night and he had presumably had breakfast, which I had not. His son-in-law and an interpreter-officer made up the party of four. The big limousine did a quick time to Pella. There is one basement of a house there that can be found with some trouble, intact and open to the air. Some archæologists disinterred it a few years ago. The General explored these ruins with the energy of a boy. He had question after question for the interpreter-officer, who in private life is a professor of archæology himself. To find a fragment of a broken vase delighted him; he was full of jokes about the statue of a lady which some French soldiers had unearthed; a weasel, scampering off among the stones, drew from him a vigorous view-halloa. But for his plain khaki uniform anyone passing would have seen no more than a tall, vigorous, white-haired man finding unusual zest in his country walk; they would hardly have suspected that on those shoulders rested



the responsibility for the most complicated campaign in which the Allies have engaged. But this easy-going mood only lasted for half an hour, about as much time as, if he were a smoker, the General might spend over an early cigar, and it was not yet seven in the morning. By ten minutes past Sarraïl was the Commander-in-Chief again. We had gone on to the headquarters of a French cavalry regiment, and he was snapping out his swift questions, and pouring out his rapid flow of talk, which loses nothing in vigour and intensity from an over-particular choice of polite language.

Energy, concentration, ambition, fearlessness, an absolute craving for responsibility rather than the dread of it which afflicts some men when at his age of sixty they have found themselves loaded with the cares and the risks of commanding a large army in the field—those are some of the dominant features of the personality of General Sarraïl. He radiates vitality; he is always keyed up to concert pitch. By these things you may know a leader of men. You must add to this a remarkable charm of manner, which is by no means all due to the fact that he is one of the handsomest men in the army he commands. He is a tall man, over six feet high, and his height would be even more noticeable were it not for a stoop of the shoulders which has come to him through years of concentration as a military student, but which yet accords well with an air of refinement and intellectuality that is in his bearing. His face is one of unusual distinction, clear cut and aquiline, and his high forehead rises to fine, wayward hair of that radiant whiteness which is an adornment rather than a disfigurement of age. His grey eyes are alert and full of expression, humorous if he is not crossed, glittering with fierceness if he is roused. For General Sarraïl has a temper that is not slow of kindling.

"They say I am impetuous," he said once to a friend of mine who knows him well. "I am; I admit it. I am patient as long as I can be, but—*gare le jour où la moutarde me monte au nez!*"

There are few generals in the Allied service who have been set a harder task than Sarrail. For one thing, he commands a more heterogeneous army than has been gathered together since the Crusades. Each of the Allied contingents under his leadership has a different language, different methods, different traditions, different prejudices. They all of them want to win the war, but among people of such varied character and temperament it is easy to see how divergences of opinion may arise as to which is the best way to do it. There never was yet a football team of eleven men in which criticisms and even squabbles did not arise, and when you have nearer half a million people of six distinct nationalities to deal with the same thing will happen. Even the Allied Governments need to be constantly meeting in council so that they may "bring their views into harmony," but at Salonica, which is a microcosm of the Allies, there is nothing to keep our different military contingents working together in loyal and co-ordinated effort except the personality and the authority of General Sarrail. He has had to hold his team together as well as to fight the enemy and for nearly two years he has carried that task through with courage, energy and success.

And, furthermore, Sarrail has been all the time in the difficult position of a workman who is called upon to make bricks without straw. The Western front has had the first call upon men and material of war. Commanders there have had personal access to the Allied General Staffs to explain and urge their plans, while Sarrail has been in charge of a campaign which is liable both to suffer from divergences of view among the Allies and to fall into the background through its

## 262 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

own remoteness. It is easy, when full success fails to crown an enterprise, to lay the blame upon the man responsible for conducting it on the spot, but in this case, given the inadequate numbers of the Balkan Army, and the unusual difficulties of the country it is fighting in, who can say that another general would have accomplished more ?

The same lack of full comprehension that has inspired criticisms of our generals in the Balkans has led to the development of the idea that Salonica is a "picnic" for the men. If it were, one can only say that people out there keep extraordinarily quiet about the good time they are supposed to be having, and show praiseworthy self-sacrifice in trying to get away from it and back to the Western front. But the idea that the soldier lives an easy and safe life in Macedonia is absurdly false. He works as hard as a human being can all the time, whether he is in the line or out. When he comes out it is not to go into the relative rest of billets, as in France. He is brought back a few hundred yards and sets up his bivouac shelter-tent, which is all he has as protection both against summer sun and winter snow, and digs, digs, digs eternally. There is very little leave for the soldier in the Balkans. There are battalions which have been in the front line for seven months without relief, and when you consider that our trenches are shelled every day and that patrols go out every night, seven months needs a good deal of luck to get through without hurt. As for malaria, dysentery and other diseases unknown to the soldier in France, the figures I have given in another chapter are an indication of the extent to which they appear in the programme of the "picnic." You are about as likely to get through the summer without malaria in the Balkans as you are to go through an English winter without catching cold.

It is the terrible monotony of life on the Macedonian front that is one of its chief hardships. Away up there on stony hillsides, with nothing but the same great tracts of open country before their eyes, the men hanker above everything for a change. They have many of them hardly seen a town since they landed in the Balkans nearly two years ago, nor even a building, except for the mud hovels of a ruined Greek village. The official title, "Salonica Army," has led to the notion that our force on the Balkan front spends its time sitting in cafés in Salonica itself. By far the great majority of the men have never seen the place except as they passed through it on their way up-country, a few hours after setting foot on the quay.

But, though I have visited every part of our Macedonian front, I have never seen or heard of the least sign of a flagging of their spirits. They are eager for a fight when it comes, and between whiles they hold the line, and dig, and carry water up steep slopes through endless communication trenches with cheerfulness in their hearts, if voice and bearing be any key to their feelings. I cannot imagine on what strangely inaccurate reports the suggestion made recently in the House of Commons was based, that the men of the Salonica Army were losing their *moral*. On the contrary, their discipline is remarkably good, and military "crime" rare.

They keep themselves amused, in the rare leisure that they get, by their own exertions. No companies of London actors or travelling cinema-shows reach the Balkans, but the quality of the entertainments that the men themselves produce is really astonishing. One division's pantomime played to 20,000 people during its run, and it would have gone with as great success on a London stage. A huge barn was fitted up by the Engineers as a theatre, close up to the front lines, and arrangements were made for detachments

## 264 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

of men belonging to battalions that were out of the line to be brought to see it. A tumbledown Greek house next door was fitted up into the "Palace Hotel" for officers who had come so far that they had to stay the night after the show.

It was remarkable how every unit that produced a show invariably found someone to fill excellently the part of principal girl. The leading lady of the highly successful revues, "Hullo, Salonica," and "Bonjour, Salonique," at the Ordnance Base Depot was a marvel of feminine grace and beauty. There was a charming brunette in the Durham Light Infantry's "Aladdin," who rolled most captivating eyes at her audience, while the Kitty of a divisional pantomime was the flapper of a dream—dainty, modest, with eyes, and a smile, and ankles that made it seem impossible, as you looked across the footlights, that she should be a corporal in a field-ambulance who had been wrestling in the mud with refractory mules all day. Kitty and the Beauty Chorus which supported her were dressed regardlessly, to the full extent of the resources of the dressmakers and lingerie merchants of Salonica, and somewhere in the archives of the Salonica Army there is a telegram, sent down from the front to an officer of the division who was on three days' leave in town, in approximately these terms: "Urgent. Bring back with you without fail to-night the following: Three pairs silk stockings size seven and one lace-embroidered camisole for Kitty, five yards pink satin for Abanazar's second wife and a black stuff dress for Mrs. Twankey." And scrawled across the telegram is the indignant endorsement: "G.H.Q. demands an immediate explanation of this idiotic rubbish passing over Army wires."

Gardening is another diversion of the British Army in the Balkans. It is, indeed, officially enjoined, with the aim of raising as much as possible

## PEOPLE AND THINGS IN MACEDONIA 265

on the spot in the way of vegetables for varying and expanding the rations of the troops, and prizes are offered for the best produce in a brigade or divisional area. I remember one quaint meeting I had with a stolid old fellow up at the front, elderly for a private, who, but for his khaki trousers, would have been the type of a family gardener at home. His little patch was in a nullah that was shared by a battery of 60-pounders, whose particularly violent discharges filled the echoing ravine with din about once a minute. Yet, undisturbed, he leaned upon his rake and looked at his plants in that resigned way beloved of gardeners: "Yus, the tomaties is doin' well, I don't say but what they ain't. Them beans, now"—"*Cr-r-rash*" from a 60-pounder—"them beans won't never come to no good. Sun's too 'ot for them. Want a bit o' rain, that's what they want. That 'ere spinach, now, seeded before it was three inches high. Too thin, the syle is, that's what it is," and another eruption of the guns punctuated his dreary monotone.

A little shooting is about all that officers get in the way of amusement. Game abounds in Macedonia; there are snipe and duck in the marshes, partridges and hares on the plains and hills. These excursions lead sometimes to strange encounters. There was an officer of Yeomanry on the Struma who went out before dawn one day for the morning flight of geese to a place he had noticed when on patrol between the lines. While lying up there he saw with consternation three Bulgars with rifles in their hands advancing through the reeds. Was it a patrol that had seen him go in, and was bent on capturing him? He tried to move off as inconspicuously as possible, but the Bulgars saw him, and immediately dropped their rifles and put up their hands. The situation having taken this agreeable

## 266 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

turn, the officer decided that there was no need to interrupt his morning's sport, so he kept his prisoners waiting until he had shot three geese and two duck, and then made them carry them in for him.

Another sportsman who bears a name well known at Olympia Horse Shows in bygone days got out several couples of beagles and hunted hares, as in the story of Brigadier Gérard. One day his beagles ran a hare out through our lines and into Poroi station, which was held by a Bulgarian outpost, where the Master, who had followed them as far as seemed prudent, abandoned them as certain prisoners to the enemy, and broke off the hunt. ~ But a few hours later his little beagles came trotting in, perfectly safe and satisfied with their run into the enemy's country.

The night patrolling, which makes up so much of the day-to-day work of the troops in the front line in the Balkans, is entered into with zest. In fact, I have heard an officer whisper, when out with a night patrol, as the severest threat he could use to a man : "If you can't make less noise than that, Brown, I won't bring you out again." This night hunting appeals to the sporting instincts of the men, and it is wonderful training for young officers. For patrolling in the Balkans is not, as on the Western front, a matter of crawling about in a shell-cratered interval of a couple of hundred yards in width, lit up by ceaseless German flares. The Macedonian method has greater scope. It involves a sort of little campaign of its own. It fixes on its own line of advance, chooses alternate routes for possible retirement, has supporting patrols at certain points in rear to fall back upon in case of need, decides what defensive positions it shall hold if attacked by superior force—the Bulgars hardly ever venture out except in parties of fifty at a time—sends out scouts ahead and main-

tains a rearguard behind. For there are places on our front where the opposing lines of trenches are a couple of miles apart, the lie of the ground being such that if either side advanced its position it would put itself in a condition of inferiority with regard to the other, and in that space there is plenty of room for ambushes and traps and night surprises. There are hills and ravines and woods and ruined villages, the last of which are usually the goals of our patrolling parties, as the enemy's outposts sometimes occupy them at night. It is an eerie business moving for two miles or so in single file, with all the stealth of burglars crossing a wired lawn (for the same reasons, too, since the Bulgars occasionally lay trip-wires for our men to ring a bell or detonate a bomb, so that they, lying up at close range, can get a sitting shot). Each step has to be taken as gently as if you were in a sick-room, and innumerable times you must crouch to the ground completely motionless, while the leader reconnoitres a mysterious shadow that looks as if it might be a lurking Bulgar. The meeting of hostile patrols, when it does come, is a sudden affair of bomb and bayonet, which, though it end in victory, often means a difficult journey back across rough country carrying wounded men in the dark.

Strange things happen sometimes in villages that are regularly occupied by our outposts. In one of them our men noticed that punctually at nine-fifteen every evening a country-bred dog came loping along the main street, and about a quarter of an hour afterwards went silently back towards the Bulgar lines. He did not look like the ordinary scavenger dog of Greek villages, who snaps at your heels till you pelt him away with stones. This dog had a serious air, as of one in regular employment. He never varied his pace; he was as regular as a City man going for his morning train. The men got a little uneasy about



him. His punctuality and purposefulness were uncanny. Titbits of bully beef were held out as he trotted past. He did not even glance at them. Then someone suggested that there might be a Bulgar spy hidden in the village and that the dog had been trained to fetch and carry messages between him and the enemy. In the first indignation of this idea a sergeant took a shot at the dog. It missed, but the dog never even growled; he just swung on a little faster towards his mysterious destination. He was clearly a soldier-dog, and prepared to accept the risks of his calling. So orders were given that the animal was not to be shot at any more. He was to be tracked instead, followed on his errand. It was a clever, elusive mongrel, though, and despite the fact that men were posted at the crossings of the different streets to watch which way he went, he would slip in and out of the confused shadows of those tumble-down houses so quickly that in the poor light even the sharpest-eyed soldier could not follow him.

There was a *dénouement* to this. A soldier going into one of the deserted houses to look for firewood suddenly met, at the turn of the wall, a grey-coated figure face to face. Both men, Bulgarian and Englishman, started back in mutual astonishment. Then the spy leapt round into the darkness, for it was at night. The Englishman was after him immediately, but the Bulgar knew the twists and turnings of his lurking-place, and got away—to fall later into the hands of a party sent to search for him. Was he the mysterious dog-messenger's master? You could hardly expect him to give so faithful an animal away.

Occasionally the patrols find proclamations that have been left for them by enemy parties the previous night. These have to be approached cautiously, since they are sometimes only a decoy to bomb-traps. Here is the text of one that was found while

## PEOPLE AND THINGS IN MACEDONIA 269

I was staying with a brigade on the Doiran-Vardar front. We had seen it with glasses, stuck up on a bush in front of the Bulgar trenches, and the following night a small patrol went out and got it. It begins :

“ To the English and French troops :  
WE ARE DEFENDING THE FRONTIERS OF OUR COUNTRY AND THE RIGHTS OF OUR PEOPLE. You are well aware of the love Bulgarians possess for their (*sic*) country and the bravery with which they are fighting against the aspirations of their numerous enemies is well known to you. For our country's glory we are ready to die and we shall do every think (*sic*) to prevent the enemy from entering our territory. What are you doing in this foreing country ? Are you still believing in the hideous lies of your statesmen telling you you are fighting for the liberty and independence of the small nations ? Has it never come to your thoughts that you are doing just the contrary here ? Look at Roumania, hitherto so flourishing. There you will see the work your diplomats have been doing. She also was forced to take part in this war and in hardly more than 2 months she has been conquered by us and our allies. Bukarest and the whole Roumanian territory are in our hands. More than 250,000 Roumanian soldiers and 1,000 guns have been captured. Practically the whole country is devastated in consequence of operations of war. Look at Greece. What are your governments doing with her poor and unfortunate populations ? Are the manipulations going on the re (*sic*) not disgracefull and certainly not creditable to nations pretending to be the guardians of the small nations ? Why are you still following your leaders ? Why not ask them to be brought back to your country where your wives and children are awaiting you impatiently ? If this is impossible, come over to us.

## 270 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Don't believe that we are barbarians. Our prisoners, but especially English and French, are very well treated by us, and the nourishment leaves nothing to be desired. Instead of staying in humid trenches day and night and thereby supporting an unjust and disgracefull action come over to us and render yourselves, in order to put and end to the injustice and infamy your statesmen are forcing you to do."

Despite all this eloquence, including that supreme touch about nourishment that "leaves nothing to be desired," which surely stamps the author of the document as a German ex-hotel manager, the enemy in the Balkans never got a single prisoner from the Allies for whom they did not have to fight hard, and very few indeed of those, while, on the other hand, there are great camps at Salonica of both Bulgar and German captives in addition to those who have been shipped away.

The Allied propaganda took a more artful form. The French had a lot of picture postcards taken showing Bulgar prisoners lining up for their midday ration, each with a half-loaf of bread under his arm and a steaming pannikin of soup in his hand. These they got Bulgar prisoners to sign, with the addition of a little message about the good treatment they had received, and they were then dropped over the enemy lines as a corrective to the stories which Bulgar officers used to tell their men about the certainty of execution which awaited them if they fell into the hands of the Allies. The plan met with much success. Deserters kept constantly coming in, and many of them brought these postcards with them, evidently considering them as a sort of safe-conduct or prospectus. One man said he had paid fifteen francs for his copy to another Bulgar who had found it.

But the Bulgar is by no means a despicable fighter.



---

*{Official Photograph}*



He is as good as the 1917 Boche. Physically he is a sturdy fellow, as ugly as sin, with the Mongolian writ plainly on his unshaven face. In all essentials he is well equipped. Prisoners always have good boots. Their packs are full of practical things—such as a sort of German “Tommy’s cooker” spirit-stove. One deserter had five pounds of sugar in his pack.

In action the Bulgars are slow to renew a first effort that has been defeated. In a retreat it is likely that they would be quite undisciplined. The tactics which we have from the first employed against them—to attack with dash and counter-attack at once—have invariably justified themselves. Their artillery is good, but they do not seem to be able to stand shelling, being in that respect very different to their Turkish allies, who are stolid and impassive upon the defensive under the worst bombardment.

On the whole our men feel no special resentment against the Bulgar as an enemy. They will tell you, in fact, several stories of instances in which he has behaved chivalrously in battle, in the way of letting wounded men be brought in, even by means of ambulance wagons within short range of the Bulgar positions. There is reason to believe that such men of ours as fall into the enemy’s hands are well treated, until, at any rate, they have been passed back behind divisional headquarters; what happens to them in the interior of Bulgaria is not entirely known; probably the Bulgars differentiate in their treatment of the various nationalities among the Allies. A Bulgarian deserter gave me a grim account of the massacre of Serbian prisoners at Prilep in November, 1915, of which he said he had been an eye-witness. Three or four hundred of them were marched out from the town, made to dig their own grave, then surrounded by a cordon of infantry and cut down by

## 272 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

a squadron of cavalry who rode in amongst them, after which dead and wounded alike were pushed into the pit and covered up.

Taken prisoners themselves, the Bulgars behave sullenly but with docility. Stolidity, doggedness, obstinacy, and the quality of being what they call in Scotland "dour," are the most marked traits of the Bulgar character. They were always the Boches of the Balkans—disobliging, self-confident to the degree of arrogance, worshippers of uniform, both of the military officer and the civilian official—the sort of people one did not get on with personally however one might admire their independence of character and the energy which had changed Sofia from a Turkish provincial town into a tolerably modern city in one generation. Their temperament inclines them to take the war with a certain sober relish and earnestness. I was with their army—then an untried and underestimated force—on manœuvres five years ago, and was struck by the seriousness with which the rank and file entered into the details of mimic warfare. I also saw them beat the Turks at Lule Burgas, and though with the other side, one could not help realising that they were an army of high quality and training for a Balkan State. They had already acquired the first elements of some facts that were not yet fully realised by far more important European armies even when the Great War came, for it was by artillery superiority and by great predominance of machine-guns that they defeated the Turk at Lule Burgas, however much the latter's natural disorder in a war of movement under his own native leadership contributed to his undoing.

Among recollections of Macedonia, the one which will live longest in the memories of those who have spent a summer there is that of its flies.

"Réveillé is when I get up," is the remark attributed to some general who had strong views about early rising. He could not have been so positive if he had been a general in the Salonica Army, for there, in summer at least, réveillé is when the flies get up. They take good care of that, and their punctuality in this respect, to say nothing of their dash, élan, and determination in following up an objective, is enough to make the Macedonian fly a stimulating example to the young soldier.

The time between about four and five on a bright June morning, when it is already broad daylight but not yet time to turn out, ought really to be the pleasantest of all the hours of rest. The sun shines into the tent strongly enough to rouse you, and yet réveillé is still distant. The disagreeable necessity of having to leap up from happy unconsciousness to face instantly the ordeals of shaving and dressing is completely avoided. You ought to be able to pass gently over a sort of twilight bridge from slumber to activity.

But the kindly dispositions of Nature in this respect are entirely defeated in the Balkans by the misplaced activity of the fly. No sooner has the morning sun, flooding in through the triangle of the tent-door, brought you to a voluptuous state of conscious repose, than the first fly of the day, with startling suddenness, settles on your face.

An instantaneous and only half-conscious twitch sends him off again as abruptly as if it were just a mistake. A second later, though, and he is back—a brief buzz as he lands, then that maddening, concentrated tickle of his six feet. With desperate malice he perches on the corners of his victim's lips, his temples—anywhere that is peculiarly sensitive.

His buzzes of delight now awake the other flies sleeping in the conical tent-top. They shake them-



## 274 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

selves, preen their wings and legs complacently at the prospect of another day of persecution, and come trooping down to join him. The weary soldier, with a sleepy oath, pulling the blanket over his head, fights in vain for that last half-hour of drowsy slumber. The flies have discovered that drawing up the blanket has thrown his feet open and they start a diabolical tickle-dance upon his toes. He twists and wriggles, tugs the blanket this way and that, waves clumsy hands ineffectually through the empty air. The damnable titillation skips from one part of his body to another, and his temper is already one of black fury before he is properly awake. Réveillé comes as a relief under such circumstances, and in an atmosphere studded with flies, growing more and more active and excited as the warm sun cooks the tented air up to its morning temperature of 105 degrees, he starts to dress.

But it is only the comparatively slow-witted flies that choose tents for their area of operations; the wideawake ones, as you find when you go across to breakfast, are all in the mess, and the result is that your first impression of the breakfast-table is that it is not set for a meal at all but for a conjuror's entertainment. No food is visible. Instead, there are a number of objects completely hidden under thick shrouds of gauze, and several large tins turned upside down like the hollow black boxes from beneath which glasses of water are made to vanish by the tap of a wand at children's parties.

"Butter, sir?" says the mess-waiter, approaching the mysteriously furnished board. One has a fascinated feeling that he may suddenly produce it from one of the pockets of your tunic, or offer instead a white rabbit or bowl of goldfish drawn out of the folds of green gauze. As he pulls away the veil, however, you see a dish of half-melted butter, into

which twenty flies spring with suicidal eagerness. You snatch a dripping spoonful, the waiter vigorously chases the surviving flies out again, and the butter vanishes once more beneath its shroud.

The most ticklish part of the meal, though, is when it comes to helping yourself to marmalade. This calls for the closest co-operation between breakfaster and mess-waiter, since the most active flies reserve themselves entirely for attacks upon the marmalade. As the waiter twitches off the tin conjuring-box you find underneath a smaller tin of marmalade, whose gaping mouth is instantly almost blocked by greedily jostling flies. Pushing these aside with your spoon you take what you want, usually burying one or two of the bolder insects at each spoonful, and you then have to carry on a sort of rearguard action with the remainder until the pot is safely within its defences once more.

Meanwhile other flies are attacking the marmalade on your plate, and as you raise each jam-spread piece of bread to your mouth, you are obliged to protect it on its way by waving your right hand to and fro over it in the air. The sight of a whole mess eating bread and marmalade on a hot morning like this is remarkable. They look like a party of would-be magicians making futile passes over their food in the hope of changing it into something more appetising.

It is not to be supposed, however, that the flies have it all their own way. Most vigorous reprisals are practised upon them, and it may be said that its own high standards of energy, ingenuity, and pertinacity are thoroughly maintained by the British Army in warfare with these ever-present enemies.

The multitude of the means by which the defeat of the fly may be compassed is astonishing. They are of two chief classes—preventive and punitive.

## 276 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Fly-whisks, fly-proof huts, gauze curtains, mosquito netting, and the burning in saucers of mysterious substances supposed to keep flies away, are some of the preventive measures used. But it is the engines of retaliation that are naturally more popular with the soldier.

The most elementary of these is the fly-strafer, or fly-kesh. This consists simply of six inches by three of wire gauze let into a twelve-inch wooden handle, and the demand for these primitive instruments can be realised from the fact that though the cost of their manufacture might conceivably be a penny, the largest store in Salonica sells hundreds of them at a shilling each.

Fly-destroyers of a more scientific kind are also sent out from London by parcel-post, chiefly of the nature of fly-guns (a dilettante weapon) and swatters of complicated kinds. But the use to which they are put is so enormous that such elaborate instruments soon break under the strain, and spare parts cannot be obtained.

As regards fly-papers whole pages could be written of the various kinds that are in use and their comparative merits. The mere difference of opinion as to whether a fly settles more readily on a flat surface or on an edge is enough to divide the Salonica Army into two distinct schools. One prefers the broad slabs of treacly paper that seem to be the favourite arm of the local population, while the others have a higher opinion of the killing qualities of a long, sticky, spiral string. The best thing is to back your chance both ways.

Officers of scientific training claim that the fumes of certain liquids are what the fly most dreads. They wait in such patience as they may till evening, when the tired fly gathers by hundreds in the narrow funnel of canvas at the top of the tent pole, and then

fumigate him with the vapours of ill-smelling chemicals burnt in the lids of tobacco tins. The expedient is one of rather dubious advantage, for during the rest of the evening a constant drizzle of stupefied flies prevails, and it takes a long time to brush the bodies out of one's hair afterwards.

But undoubtedly the methods of fly extinction that give the most satisfaction to the persecuted soldier are those which are a little vindictive in their operation. The buzz of ineffectively struggling wings that comes from a well-covered fly-paper has a savagely soothing effect upon one's temper, and to see a tentful of hot, tired, irritated Tommies clearing for action as a fly-strafting party on a sultry afternoon is a lesson in studied ferocity. You must realise that at Salonica, with its June temperatures of over 90 in the shade, daylight saving is not a legislative luxury but a primary necessity. The men start work at 5 a.m., and in standing camp during the hottest part of the day, as far as the work of the unit allows, they rest. "To rest" is hard enough anyhow, sweltering in a tent as hot as the jowl of Moloch, but when you have got to share that tent not only with seven other men, but with as many hundred flies, the very pretence is a torture. So a fatigue of two of the surest fly-slayers goes first into the midst of the buzzing, tickling, maddening crowd. "Reach me that 'ere towel, Bill," hisses the leader through tight lips. "Got yours? *Now* then, you blighters!" And frantic flies, stampeding for safety to the top of the tent, are felled and flattened by dozens at a blow.

By the same token a certain kind of wire trap seems popular because it catches the little fiends alive and keeps them buzzing and bumping up against each other all day, so that they get before they die a taste of the irritation they cause us. I suppose it is the utter uselessness of the fly that makes normally

## 278 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

humane people feel so barbarous towards him. If their attacks had some clear object, such as biting or stinging, one might even hate them less, but the futility of an insect that goes crawling all over you for apparently no reason but exercise is not to be borne.

Needless to say, the most painstaking trouble is taken in the Army to stop flies breeding, just as Mrs. Partington took trouble to sweep the Atlantic from her doorstep. The doctors did everything conceivable in the spring to keep them down, and even invented a mysterious and special preparation known as "Solution C," to sprinkle over everything that was capable of serving as a fly maternity home. Manure is burnt or buried; horse-lines are swept and garnished several times a day. But where hundreds of thousands of men and hundreds of thousands of animals are gathered together, especially in that climate, and in the neighbourhood of towns and villages where public health regulations barely exist, you might as well hope to stop the summer sun from rising as to make more than a relative difference to the plague of summer flies. The fact that the Army is not persecuted a thousandfold worse shows how well the doctors' precept and the soldiers' practice have worked together.

It is at the hospitals, of course, that the fly gives the worst trouble, and he is fought there like the pest he is. To let the air in and keep the flies out is the great problem of every hospital. Not only do flies help more than any other cause to fill the dysentery wards, but they torment enfeebled fever patients to the borders of insanity. In an active campaign it would be far worse, of course. The most ghastly recollection I brought away from the peninsula was the chance remark of a doctor that during the worst of the summer weather there, as

you went to touch a helpless wounded man, a black cloud of flies would start up from inside his gasping mouth.

But in a standing general hospital all sorts of ingenious devices exist to slaughter the fly, including, at one casualty clearing station near Salonica, what is claimed to be the largest fly-trap in the world—a thing as big as a hencoop, of wire gauze, within which millions of baffled flies buzz desperately until evening brings them sudden death. The best bait for these has been found to be a cocktail, Salonica cocktails being the sweetest and stickiest liquid known. But they have the disadvantage of costing two francs each.

Curiously enough, absolutely the worst place for flies that I have found in Salonica was just where one would have expected to be free of them entirely—on board a battleship over a mile from shore. It seems that when the wind sets, as it generally does, off the Vardar marshes, it blows great crowds of flies out to sea, and they avail themselves in dense swarms of the life-saving reputation of the British Navy.

But if humans suffer, what of the unfortunate horses, tied up on their lines, with no fly-traps, no fly-papers, no strafers, nothing but their tails, mercifully allowed to grow long, as a weapon against such unwearying malevolence? And not only flies, but superflies. Beastly yellow-bellied things that, if you hit them with your fly-whisk, just scuttle contemptuously to another spot, and can only be induced to leave by being pulled off with the fingers. However quiet your horse may stand as a rule, it is well to keep out of range of his heels in summer, for he is often stung into a sudden lash-out at such a trying world in general, as not a few unlucky grooms can tell.

## 280 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

Fortunately, even flies must sleep, and at night they cease from troubling. But then, just when the flies go to sleep, the mosquito wakes up.

But not all the fauna of Macedonia are the soldier's foes. Some of them he makes his intimate companions. Tortoises, for instance, which are as common in the Balkans as field-mice in England, not only serve him as pets, but as accessories to sport. Some men keep a racing stable of them, and will back their best tortoise against the fastest flyer of the next battalion over a ten-yard course. The young of these animals seem extraordinarily hardy. They make long journeys through the post, confined in cardboard boxes addressed to families in England, with no water and no nourishment other than a handful of green leaves stuffed in with them, and yet arrive in quite a lively condition.

There was a general who tamed an eagle, but most officers content themselves with adopting a puppy of the local breed of immense sheep-dog, which is supposed to be a lineal descendant of the war-dogs of Alexander the Great, is as big as a small calf and as fierce as a wolf. He becomes tame and affectionate with those he knows, but his welcome for strangers is simply to charge straight at them with great white fangs showing and a vicious snarl that leaves no doubt as to his intentions. If you do not know the owner of the brute the only thing to do when this happens is to shoot him if you have a pistol—quite a number of men have been pulled down and worried by them—or to throw stones at him if you have not. Once, going outside my tent in my pyjamas in the early morning at a Corps Headquarters, I was attacked by two of them which seemed to belong to the place. There were no stones, but I went through the motions of picking them up, which kept the two dogs at bay for a moment with

the thick manes on the back of their necks bristling and their lips laid back. One was working round behind me, though, and I fully expected to feel a set of savage teeth meeting in the back of my leg, when a sleepy voice from a tent near by, awakened by the clamour, called out in gentle reproof, "Endymion, Endymion, come here, you naughty dog!" Endymion, however, was out for blood, and would have had it a moment later if his indulgent owner had not got out of bed and appeared with a hunting-crop, at the sight of which both the hulking animals crept growling away.

The French do not go in so much for taming the wild creatures of Macedonia as for eating them. Wherever a French battalion is encamped, there will you find half a dozen soldiers wading about in the streams driving the frogs into a net they have set further down. Some of them, in a fine spirit of enterprise, tried fillets of the snakes they caught lying out in the sun, and I was assured by a French officer that much was to be said for a dish of tortoises' brains, which a former *chef* in his company prepared exquisitely, the ingredients for it being obtained by catching a number of tortoises and tickling their tails until the irritation compelled them to stick out their heads at the other end, which were then instantly cut off.

There is one sector of the Balkan front that I have not yet mentioned, but of which I always think with pleasure, partly perhaps because I only visited it under the beautiful conditions of early summer, when the Struma valley for a few brief weeks is one of the loveliest places in Europe. It is the eastern end of the Struma line, at the top of the Gulf of Orfano, the most difficult part of our front to reach from Salonica. When I went there in the spring all the wild flowers one had ever heard of seemed to be



## 282 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

in brilliant bloom. Above all, poppies—millions of crimson wild poppies, great fields of heavy white opium-poppies. Unless you have seen the Dutch tulip fields in spring you can hardly realise the masses of solid colour made by these fragile flowers of the Struma. You ride up to the horse's belly in flowers, and heavy, seductive scents rise up from the petals you trample down. But a week or two later the hot sun has shrivelled everything, and only a waste of burnt yellow vegetation remains.

As for crops, there are such crops of wild-sown oats as would satisfy many an English farmer for a season's labour. Fruit of all kinds—peaches, water-melons, tomatoes. The best tobacco in the world, of course. "Why, they even grow cotton-wool here," I heard an English soldier from Wigan say, astonished to find on a plant what he had always before seen in bales.

Very pleasant and restful the Struma looks in the spring, and so it would be if it were not for the war and the fact that the valley is one of the most deadly malarial belts on earth, capable of contesting with West Africa the title of "White Man's Grave."

Down at the eastern end of the Struma line we are fighting on the very site of the ancient city of Amphipolis, which Cleon attacked in the Peloponnesian war. "Cleon, the demagogue, don't you know," explains a subaltern who was on the Modern side at school three years ago, speaking with the authoritative air of a Regius Professor of History, "and of course, Brasidas, the Spartan fellow, was killed here, too—just about down there by those mule-lines we think it would be; and then Thucydides, you know, got Stellenbosched for not getting his fleet up in time from Thasos over there, so he naturally got disgruntled, and wrote his history to explain what really happened."

## PEOPLE AND THINGS IN MACEDONIA 283

And as you go round their trenches and have it pointed out to you that "their palisade probably followed just about the line of our wire," you reflect how English schoolboys have suffered for generations in their souls and persons to acquire painful knowledge of a series of skirmishes that nowadays we should hardly put in the *communiqué*.

But grave trouble is preparing for the archæologists of the future on the site of Amphipolis. Where antiquaries debate and hesitate, the soldier steps boldly in. "This is Brassidas's tomb, then?" I said to a staff-officer, pointing to a spot so marked on the brigade map. "Well, *I* called it that," was the modest reply. "There was a rather fine carved lion there, and I happened to want a name for that place, so I decided to give old Brassidas the benefit of it as a monument."



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WHAT IS HAPPENING IN ALBANIA.

AMONG the many extraneous and political rather than military problems with which the Allies have had to grapple in the Balkans is that eternal and thorny question of Albania.

It was some time before Albania was drawn into the Balkan battle-area, but first the Austrians advanced from the north down to the line of the Skumbi river, then the Italians, who had landed at Valona, extended their area by successive steps up-country with a view to stopping contraband between Greece and the Central Empires, while the French were led by similar reasons to push on into Albania from the other side. The result of these converging movements was that on February 17th the French and Italians met near Erzeg, about halfway across Albania, and the Allied front across the Balkans was joined up into a continuous line that now stretches from where the English sentry stands on the shore of the Ægean at Stavros to the Italian sentry on the shore of the Adriatic at Santi Quaranta. These movements of penetration naturally implied the conciliation as far as possible of the native Albanian population. But natives of Albania are most difficult people to conciliate, because so few of them think alike. Though of the same race and language, some of the population is Mussulman and some Christian. The Albanians are, moreover, divided by

## 286 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

most bloodthirsty family feuds. They go armed, and have been accustomed for centuries to carry on murderous vendettas among themselves. Their country is a roadless, railless, riverless desert of very steep and barren mountains for the most part, though in south-western Albania there are extremely fertile valleys. Hospitable to the few individual strangers who travelled in their land (who were before the war chiefly Austrian agents and young Englishmen of adventurous tastes), they have always been formidable neighbours. The Greeks used to have a significant proverb, used to encourage people in distress: "Don't despair. God is not an Albanian." The Turks claimed to be the overlords of Albania from the middle of the fifteenth century till 1912, but their rule amounted to nothing more than spasmodic attempts at the exaction of tribute, which usually led to the massacre of the soldiers sent to collect it. Turkish sovereignty consequently manifested itself by little more than the conferring upon some Albanian feudal chief of the title of Pasha.

After the Balkan wars followed the misguided attempt of the Powers to settle the condition of these wild clansmen in the heart of Europe by giving them a German king—the Prince of Wied. He exercised a ridiculous semblance of sovereignty, while the Greeks entrenched upon his realm in the south and the Austrians in the north. Essad Pasha, one of the great Albanian Beys of the north, who had begun as the Prince's Minister of War, was driven away by the jealousy of the Austrians, who dominated the so-called "Mpret of Albania." They even bombarded his house with a field-gun at 600 yards' range the last night he was in Durazzo, in the hope of putting an end to his career. So Essad went away, then returned and drove out the Prince, and became President of Albania in his stead, until he too was

compelled to leave his country by the Austrian invasion.

The one sentiment which the turbulent inhabitants of Albania seem to have in common is a fierce determination that Albania shall remain independent. They hate the Greeks, whose bands of irregulars have attempted to secure southern Albania for their country by the simple process of massacring the non-orthodox Albanians who live there. Leskovici, a beautifully situated and once prosperous town on the solitary road across Albania, is now no more than a heap of burnt-out ruins, every Mohammedan house there having been destroyed by Greek bands in 1913.

At the beginning of the war the Albanians were inclined to desire the victory of the Central Powers, because they believed that this would secure the autonomy of Albania, which had been championed by Austria at the Conference of London in 1913. They feared that the triumph of the Entente would mean the division of Albania between the Greeks and the Serbs. The need of foreign protection they recognise, but they cannot make up their minds whose protection they would like.

Albanian misgivings as to the intentions of the Entente with regard to their country have been, however, considerably modified by the action both of France and Italy in proclaiming the independence of Albania in the sectors of the country which they occupy. To add to the confusion which seems the inexorable fate of this distressful country, however, the Austrians have also proclaimed the independence of Albania in their zone of occupation in the north.

The French carried out this measure with great thoroughness of detail, making Korytza, an important town in a fertile valley on the trans-Albanian road, the capital of the new republic. They hoisted as national standard the double-headed black eagle

of Scanderbeg, a mediæval Albanian chief who has been glorified into a national hero. They issued postage stamps, created a paper currency, founded an "Albanian gendarmerie" 800 or 900 strong, and entrusted the government of the Korytza region under French tutelage to a "chamber of deputies" of fourteen members—seven Mussulmans and seven Christians. I had the honour when visiting Korytza of being received in full session of this body, and having conferred upon me the honorary citizenship of the "republic of Albania," and my surprise was not small when Colonel Descoins, the French officer who presided over the proceedings, pointed out the best-dressed deputy present, a robust and middle-aged gentleman, looking like a prosperous local banker, as Themistocles Germani, a noted leader of comitadji bands, who had until a few months before been in the pay of the Austrians as a captain of irregulars, but had been won over by the proclamation of the independence of Albania to such an extent that he had become the prefect of police of the new republic.

During the short life which this district has had under French military suzerainty the indication has been evident of the possibility of prosperity for Albania under firm government. Banditism and assassination have ceased in the region patrolled by French troops, and the budget of the little "republic," £1,800 a month, covers the public expenditure. In the western part of the Italian sphere, which had only been occupied a month before I got there, the condition in which our Allies found the population was one of terrorism and starvation. The only authority was exercised by the bands. The people were living in the most abject poverty. You could buy a child for a loaf of bread, and as an officer said to me: "A company of bakers will do more to keep this country in order than a company of riflemen."

The Albanians are by no means unintelligent, savage and primitive though they look in their national dress of white and black frieze with a little skull-cap on their close-cropped heads; and now that the road right across Albania to Santi Quaranta has been put in order, you can motor the whole way, though up gradients and round such hairpin bends as make it, I should say, the most dangerous road in Europe, through a series of valleys which, as you approach the Adriatic, become more and more fertile and beautiful, their slopes being thickly wooded and the ground looking capable of responding richly to cultivation.

The increasing use of this road by Italian motor transport from Santi Quaranta leads to constant attempts by the Austrians to get down to it and interrupt the service. These are usually made through the mountains in the neighbourhood of Korytza where the road lies nearest to the territory that they occupy. Both sides employ Albanian irregulars for the most part, who, no matter on which side they fight, are all of them enrolled, curiously enough, in the name of the "independence of Albania," and paid three francs a day with rations of three pounds of flour and thirty centimes a day for meat. These comitadjis, whose military quality is not of the best, and whose allegiance is often dubious, are stiffened on either side by detachments of Austrian or French regulars.

I happened to be at Korytza when one of these Austrian attacks occurred. Two days previously I had been out with Colonel Descoins to visit the ruined town of Moschopol in the mountains north of Korytza, once one of the most flourishing places in Albania, but burnt, sacked, and left without a single living inhabitant by the Mohammedan band in 1914. While we were there a peasant came in who had



made the journey across the mountains, and told the interpreter of a concentration of some 1,200 enemy comitadjis, accompanied by Austrian regulars with machine-guns, at a village four or five hours' march away. Two days later this force was reported on the move, with the avowed intention of retaking Korytza. So the Albanian irregulars in the pay of the French were mobilised and sent up into the mountains to meet them. The process of putting on a war footing the militia of the republic of Korytza was very simple, and must have resembled the way in which the old independent towns in the Middle Ages assembled their citizens to resist an aggressive neighbour. The comitadjis, who the day before had been shopkeepers or blacksmiths or small cultivators, were summoned by the town crier, served out with captured Austrian rifles, 200 rounds of ammunition and a loaf of bread, and then drifted off at their leisure in little parties under their own leaders up into the hills. It was impossible to concentrate them into a collected force, for each little band would only obey the orders of its particular captain, and most of them had long-standing quarrels of such acuteness with the other groups that if they were brought into too close intercourse there was a chance that they might start fighting among themselves.

Quite a number of these inhabitants of Korytza had been to America for two or three years, and returned after making a little money, and it was astonishing to be addressed in a broad Yankee twang by armed individuals who looked like nothing so much as brigands of the mountains. I was standing at a street corner talking to an American ambulance man when a straggler of the forces which we relied upon for our defence went past ; he was a peculiarly fierce-looking native, in short jacket, tapering pantaloons, and shoes with upcurling toes, and had a big-

bore rifle slung across his shoulders, and a large old-fashioned silver-plated ivory-handled revolver stuck into his belt. He looked as though he had lived in a mountain cave all his life, torturing prisoners for ransom, but when he saw us his sinister features expanded into a cheery grin. "Wa-al, boys, I'm for the war, you see. S'long," he said, and left us agape.

I followed this heterogeneous host up into the mountains; you crossed the plain for four miles to their edge, and then passed up a narrow and rocky gorge to the village of Djonomas, a handful of rough-built cottages stuck one above another on the steep mountain-side like a series of pigeon-cotes.

Just beyond this was the position on which the defenders of Korytza were awaiting the enemy. The reserve line was held by elderly French soldiers of the Territorial, under the command of a gallant and picturesque old captain who had fought in the war of 1870. About 800 yards ahead on the next ridge were the Albanian irregulars, each little band under its own chieftain, crouching behind the rocks. Nothing much happened that night, but next morning we were attacked. We could see the enemy irregulars doubling over the next sky-line beyond our front, and hiding among the rocks. Our own Albanians immediately started rapid fire at a range of over one thousand yards at any point where they saw or thought they saw something moving. I went up to their line with a French officer, who urged their leaders at all cost to economise ammunition, as further supplies might be long in coming up. But as the Frenchman knew no Albanian and the Albanians extremely little French, our irregular allies persevered in this their habitual method of fighting. For the Albanian dislikes encounters at close quarters, while the noise of rapid rifle-fire, even though ineffectual, has an uplifting effect upon his spirits. An

## 292 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

hour or two later in consequence, while the lie of the position was being explained to a French staff-officer who had just come up from Korytza, someone exclaimed suddenly, pointing to a ridge which was about 500 yards on the left of our reserve line, and enfiladed it, "Are those people ours or theirs?"

"Oh, ours," said another, confidently. "Our Albanians have been there all the morning," and then, as we all turned our glasses in that direction—"they seem to be facing in this direction, though. *Bon Dieu!* I see what it is. Our *sacrés* Albanians are coming away. Those are the enemy's people on top there."

This diagnosis of the situation was immediately confirmed by a bullet which with unusual accuracy rapped up a little cloud of dust right in the middle of our group. What had happened was perfectly clear. The Albanian irregulars on our side had used up all their ammunition, were bolting, and had almost let us be surrounded.

A few moments later our unstable allies streamed past us down the hill and into the village. The appeals and curses of the French officers had small effect, being very little understood. This was the traditional Albanian method of fighting. The side that used up its ammunition first always came away, and, as there was no artillery to check the advance of the enemy, the only thing to do now was to fall back on the village of Voskop, at the other end of the gorge, where a reserve of ammunition was to be found and our irregulars could be persuaded to go on fighting. But now an Albanian leader arrived, very breathless, with the disconcerting news that the enemy had got round both flanks, and were waiting on the top of either side of the gorge to shoot us down as we retired along it. This proved to be quite untrue, but the information greatly stimulated the

eagerness of the Albanians to get away. There were a few horses in the village, and some of the Albanians seized upon them with a view to making a quicker time down the gorge. The villagers clung on to the heads of the horses and a free fight started.

As it all took place at an angle of the street which was about the size of a large drawing-room, the combat was very concentrated. Clubbed rifles fell with heavy thuds on shaven pates, but the Albanian head is solid and its owner continued to fight just as violently with blood streaming over his face. A French officer, vigorously cursing his turbulent auxiliaries, was in the middle of the *mêlée* trying to disarm the leaders, who entered with much more gusto into a bickering of this kind than into the larger encounter which they had just deserted. Some of the Albanians began to shoot, and it would really have been dangerous for all of us if they had not, in their excitement, fired without levelling their rifles, so that the bullets flew up in the air over everybody's head.

Eventually the incident was settled in some way and the retirement continued down the defile. Before we reached the end of it we met some French Senegalese advancing with grins of delight to take part in the conflict, which was particularly to their taste because there was no artillery concerned in it, so that there was a good chance of getting to close quarters, where, as they said with much relish, brandishing their heavy knives, which are like a Ghurka's kukri, "*Coupe-coupe va travailler.*"

There were two mountain-guns at Voskop which had come up from Korytza, and with these reinforcements the French drove the enemy right back, not only out of the village he had temporarily captured, but away across the hills beyond.

The situation of the Allies with regard to Albania is complicated a little further by the fact that while

## 294 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

the independence of the country is being proclaimed, Essad Pasha, whom the Entente recognised as President of Albania, is living at Salonica, with his flag, a black star on a red ground, flying over his house as the residence of the President of Albania. Essad is a big, stalwart man of fifty-two, with a red face, black moustache, alert eyes and an expression of vigour and strength. He comes of an old Albanian family called the Toptani. (Top means cannon ; his family once had a gun at a time when artillery was rare.) He was the general who defended Scutari for the Turks in the first Balkan War. When he had replaced the Prince of Wied as ruler of Albania he declared war on the Austrians in September, 1914, and the 500 men of his bodyguard who accompanied him to Salonica are fighting on the Balkan front, brigaded with the French, but paid by him. I have had several conversations with Essad Pasha about the future of Albania. His view is that the Powers after the war should re-establish a Commission of International Control, with functions not of interference but of inspection, such as was working there before. A native gendarmerie of ten to fifteen thousand men would be provided by national compulsory military service ; it would be commanded by foreign officers, chosen from nationalities that have no interest in Albania, and able to speak either Albanian or Turkish. The old Commission of International Control had already drawn up a form of constitution for Albania which had been referred back to the governments represented upon it for consideration when the great upheaval came. It provides for a chamber of deputies, elected without regard to the religious differences that divide Albania into two strongly marked communities. The proposed constitution would depend upon a common race, language, tradition and spirit of independence

to overcome that difference and unite the Albanians into one people.

The idea of a federation of Christian and Mussulman cantons on the Swiss system, which has been proposed for Albania, is not regarded with favour by Essad, because he considers that it would emphasise the existing divergences of religion and lead to hostility between the cantons. A loan, according to him, would not be necessary if the regime of the Capitulations, which is an inheritance of the old Turkish days, were abolished, so that the 11 per cent. *ad valorem* customs duties could be raised. Other sources of revenue for Albania are:—

Port and lighthouse dues ;  
Taxes on forests, mines and fisheries ;  
Tobacco Régie.

Following the example set at the time of the liberation of Bulgaria from Turkey, an international loan might be necessary for the buying out of Albania's share of the Ottoman Public Debt.

\*But whatever be the future of Albania—and it will be a small but very difficult question among those which the Allies will have to settle after the war—the Albanians can feel assured that, at any rate, we shall not make the mistake of giving them a German prince again.

## 298 THE STORY OF THE SALONICA ARMY

	PAGE		PAGE
Pantomimes . . . . .	263	Seres road . . . . .	63, 243, 249
Patrolling . . . . .	266	"Slava," Serbian . . . . .	120
Pella . . . . .	258	Spies and enemy agents . . . . .	86, 233
Petit Couronné . . . . .	152, 197	Sport . . . . .	265
Petiti di Koreto, General . . . . .	130	Strategical aims . . . . .	1, 193
Poroi . . . . .	182	Struma valley . . . . .	141, 253
Proclamations, Enemy . . . . .	269	Tenth Division . . . . .	17, 41
R.F.C. . . . .	190	Thefts from Army . . . . .	91
R.N.A.S. . . . .	191	Transport . . . . .	2, 241
Rents in Salonica . . . . .	77	Italian . . . . .	135
"Revolution," The Salo-		Troubridge, Admiral E. T. . . . .	123
nica . . . . .	106	Venizelos . . . . .	16, 75, 211, 214
R.N.R. . . . .	230	Volo . . . . .	229
Rupel fort . . . . .	101	Vrbeni . . . . .	145, 174
Sarrail . . . . .	3, 17, 112, 189, 259	Water . . . . .	251
School, Inter-Ally . . . . .	128	Wiltshires . . . . .	68
Scottish Women's Hospi-		Yenikeuy . . . . .	164
tal . . . . .	179	Yeomanry . . . . .	66, 140, 205
Serbia . . . . .	7, 16	Zeppelin brought down . . . . .	70
Serbian Relief Fund. . . . .	179	Zir . . . . .	164











